

A Honeymoon Experiment

• • • By Margaret & Stuart Chase

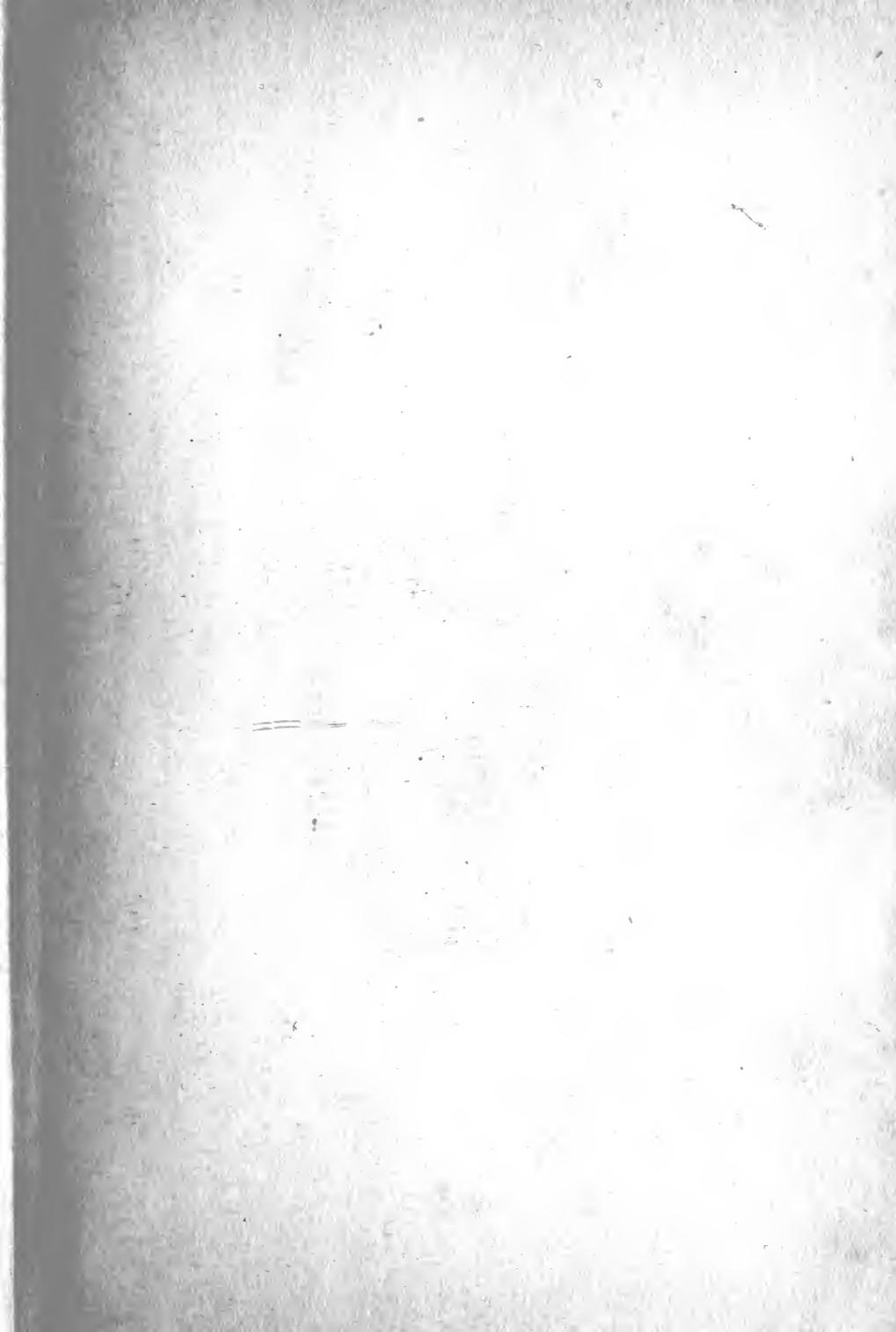


Class H 180 85

Book R 6 C 7

Copyright N° _____

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT





A Honeymoon Experiment



A HONEYMOON *EXPERIMENT*

By

Hatfield Chase

Margaret and Stuart Chase



Boston and New York
Houghton Mifflin Company
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1916

H 18085
R 6 C 4

COPYRIGHT, 1916, BY STUART CHASE

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Published May 1916

U.S.
LIBRARY
OF CONGRESS

\$1.00
MAY 22 1916

© CLA 433074

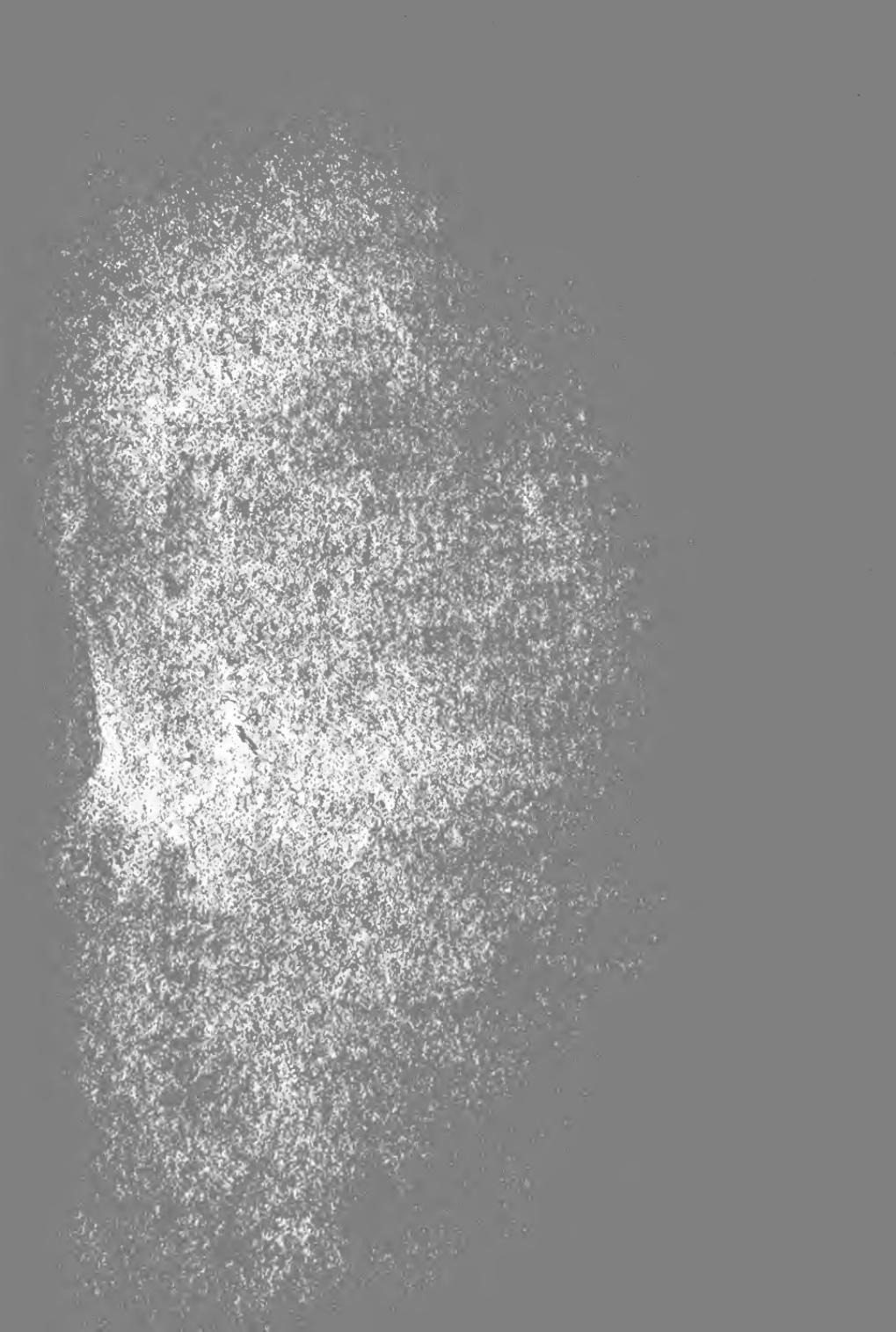
no. 1.

mcw my 23 '16

Note

THE following is a summary of our experiences as a honeymoon couple in the city of Rochester, New York, in the summer and fall of the year 1914. We have tried to give truthfully the facts of what we found, and we have also given, of necessity, certain opinions and conclusions, but these latter should, and undoubtedly will, have infinitely less weight in the mind of the reader than the former. It is primarily in the hope that the facts of our experiment will be illuminating, that we offer this little book.

MARGARET HATFIELD CHASE
STUART CHASE



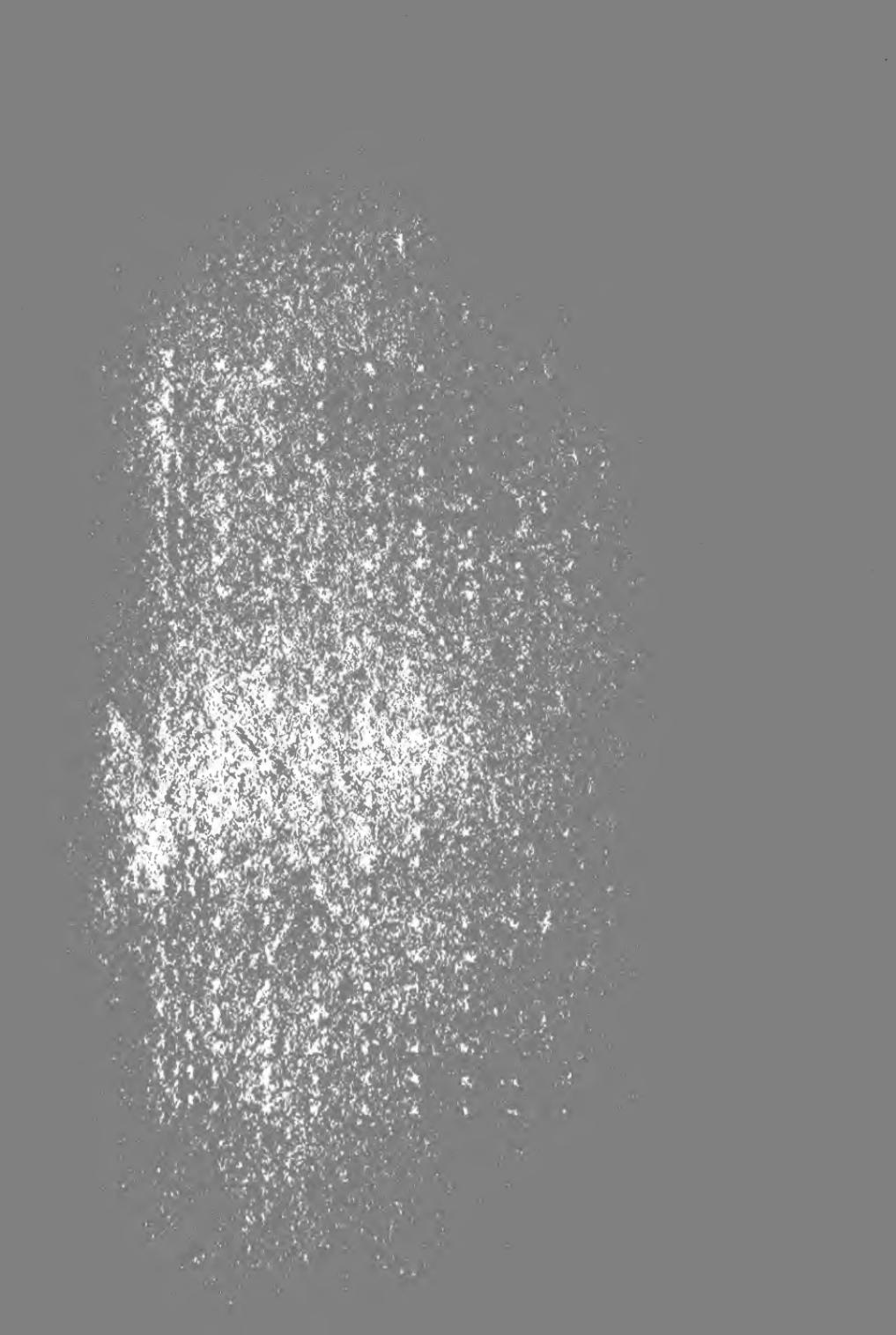
Contents

Part I

The Groom's Story	1
Why We Went	3
The First Day	10
The Boarding-House	22
Light Housekeeping	25
Unemployment	46
Employment	78
And Finally	79

Part II

The Bride's Story	85
Tramping the Streets	88
In the Employment Offices	100
Second-Maid Interviews	103
Employment	110
My First Job — Salesgirl	111
Waitress	115
Rag-Time Clerk	121
The Chemical Shop	125
The Cravat Factory	127
Piano-Player at the "Movies"	136
The White-Slave Problem	141
Another Problem	148
And Finally	154



A Honeymoon Experiment

Part I

The Groom's Story



A Honeymoon Experiment

Part I—The Groom's Story

WHY WE WENT

"ANY worthy man that wants a job can get it!"

I believe that this statement, despite the deep groove that it has worn in the average un-thinking mind, is utterly without foundation in fact. I want to tell you why I believe that it is not true. I want to tell you how I tramped for nine weeks through the streets of a great American city, and how I was unable upon application to secure work at a wage that would keep me alive.

And I want to tell you more. I want to tell you what it means to live as the average American citizen in this country has to live on his family income of \$600 a year, as given by the United States Census. I want to suggest to

A Honeymoon Experiment

you, if I can, something of the violent and absurd contrast between the way that some of us live and the way that most of us live.

We had had it rather easy, Margaret and I. We had had every normal advantage of the well-to-do child — sheltered upbringing, school, college, travel, vacations, motors, country clubs, and all the rest. Between us and necessity had always lain the heavy upholstery of our families' care. We had gone our several ways accepting, occasionally demanding. And in our immature years we came to believe, as the overwhelming majority of our complacent class believes, that one's carefully adjusted standards of living must be maintained; that it is a disgrace to be poor; and that most misery and poverty and wretchedness arises from the unthrifty, dirty, and questionable ways of the "ignorant lower classes."

I am amazed, as I look back upon my upbringing and review the narrow class distinctions that pervaded it. The "brotherhood of

The Groom's Story

man" which religion preached, "democracy" as I learned it in American history, were matters infinitely remote and apart. They were fine but formless abstractions. They were all very well to proclaim of a Sunday, but they were held to be utterly impractical in everyday living. The practical things were these: One must not play with ragged little boys. They are contaminating. One must never mention one's cousin who had the grievous misfortune to work in a factory. One must cultivate an air of intimacy in mentioning certain rich and powerful names. One must early learn to treat servants as though they were non-existent — only so may they be kept in their rightful place. One must evolve a certain scorn for all manual labor. Above all, one must hope to succeed — that is, to get rich. It is immaterial whether this success comes from an inheritance, or a lucky gamble on the stock market, or any other source short of actual robbery.

I was given literally no standards whatever

A Honeymoon Experiment

by which I might judge true worth. Education will always be the muffling, half-coherent thing it is to-day until girls and boys are taught the fundamental difference between owning something and doing something for a living, and the fundamental bond of fellowship that links all humanity together.

These distinctions had never bothered us at home. We had never heard of them in college. It was only afterwards, when we came to do a little independent thinking, that there began to creep into our lives the virus of social criticism and unrest. We met each other in this questioning stage. We groped along together, asking Why. Our love is interwoven with the rebellion of youth against a future predestined to follow fixed and rigid social standards.

We came to feel continuously uneasy before the vast injustices of "Things-as-they-are." We wanted to know why we should be well off and protected, and why little Johnny Murphy down the street was having the very devil of a

The Groom's Story

time. Our sympathies tended to drift strongly toward the working-classes. But we were overwhelmed by an avalanche of opposition from our friends. We were told that we did not know what we were talking about — that we were "theorists," "dreamers . . ." Of course we *were* theorists, and very often we had to fight strange misgivings in our own souls!

But here at last was our honeymoon! It was ours, our own, to do as we pleased with. It was the one time in all our lives when the world stood aside, and the path lay free before us. We decided to devote our honeymoon to the task of finding out more concerning the matters that so profoundly perplexed us. Ever since our first talks together we had wanted to know how it felt to live beyond the pale of family and class influence. Here was our chance. We could utilize these honeymoon weeks to start clean and clear at the bottom. We could go to some strange city as a homeless, jobless, friendless couple, and see what it meant to face existence

A Honeymoon Experiment

without an engraved passport. And in living as the average citizen lives on his meager income, we could perhaps shake off some of the superfluous standards of comfort and nicety to which we had always been accustomed, and perhaps find out how much it really costs to live.

“A man ought to have four thousand a year before he marries.”

I had heard this solemnly proclaimed time and time again by my friends.

We wanted to discover a flaw in this oracular statement. We wanted to know why we had to have \$4000 a year, while the average family, including children, was getting \$600. There was a fearful discrepancy here somewhere. We wanted to find where it lay.

Also the phrase “theorists and dreamers” rankled. It was too true. We wanted to escape the obloquy of that.

We told the family of our plan one evening around the fire. They were naturally shocked.

The Groom's Story

But they had to admit that it was our honeymoon. Beyond entertaining, I suspect, a secret belief that we were both incurably crazy, they raised no overwhelming objections. Certainly we promised to be very, very careful. . . .

We were married and went North into Ontario for a canoe trip. Of course, when two people are quite mad about each other, it is not wise to eliminate completely the romantic. There under the far northern pines, between the intervals of portages and frying bacon, we perfected our plans.

We came out of the woods, hard and brown, and headed for Buffalo. I was in favor of attacking Buffalo, but Margaret shook her head.

"We've too many friends there," she said.

So we decided to make it Rochester. Neither of us knew anything about Rochester, save that it was the home of Eastman kodaks, Cluett collars, and Susan B. Anthony. And we knew of no friends there, to entangle the adventure.

A Honeymoon Experiment

We stayed the night in the best hotel in Buffalo — much as a man who is going to give up drinking gets gloriously drunk on his last day of grace.

THE FIRST DAY

“What in the world are we going to say to people?” asked Margaret.

We debated that. Finally we decided upon the following.

Mr. and Mrs. Stuart Chase, late of Boston, where Mr. Chase had been employed as a book-keeper, but had lost his job due to dull times, have come to Rochester, hearing that it is a great manufacturing city, and both hope to secure work, in this crisis in the family affairs.

“That sounds weird,” said Margaret.

“It does,” I said, “but we’ll try it out.”

The clerk at the Iroquois gasped as we paid our bill that momentous morning. I had changed my suit to a shabby, unpressed, gray

The Groom's Story

arrangement, lamentably worn at the elbows. Margaret was shameless in a suit quite three years old! It had been made in Paris in 1911, and had never been altered! It was a perfectly good suit, but you can imagine the sensation that she created. Even the most wretched of the friends we were to make pitied her in that suit. She was to be a subject for profound consideration and sympathy! Three years behind the fashions! She was as hopelessly antiquated as a battleship that had served in the Spanish War. We were to find that the American working-girl, though she does not pay much for material, somehow achieves the ultra in cut.

The ride to Rochester was like waiting behind the scenes for the first cue of one's initial play. We could not read, we could not talk, we stared at each other, and secretly wondered whether or not our friends were right in thinking us utter idiots. The train slowed down and stopped:

“Here we are,” I said.

A Honeymoon Experiment

"Yes — here we are," said Margaret. She got up, and suddenly her eyes blazed with excitement. "It's going to be a *real* honeymoon!"

"I think it is," I said.

We got out of the Pullman, made our way through the beautiful tapestry brick station, and into the sun-drenched street. It was a rather bedraggled street, a rather uncommunicative street. We blinked at it and its sprawling shops; we blinked at each other. We were close to panic. We had not the remotest idea what to do. Our education had never included a like situation. Taxis and cabs were barred. Hotels were henceforth an unthinkable luxury.

"Let's get on a trolley," said Margaret, saver of situations. A street-car with unknown insignia wound its way out of the traffic, and came to a halt before us. To escape the agony of indecision we boarded it. It took us far out through the western portions of the city, and ultimately into the country. I drew a sheet of

The Groom's Story

paper from my pocket and roughly sketched the route that we followed. We went to the end of the line and returned — rather to the astonishment of the conductor. Dismounting at the station, we boarded a car going toward the east and repeated the experiment. So we envisaged our battlefield. We looked and looked in vain for a poor quarter such as we had known in other cities. And we made an amazing discovery, which later we verified to the full.

There are no slums in Rochester!

There are no tenements in Rochester with the exception of one street. It is a city as clean, as orderly, as spacious as Washington, yet with none of the alleys and hovels which disgrace the capital. It is infinitely astonishing to wander through a great city and find no trace of reeking alleys, crowding tenements, doorways abutting on the sidewalk with drunken stairways leading to dim, plaster-wounded mysteries beyond. There are plenty of poor in Rochester, but the majority live like civilized beings, each

A Honeymoon Experiment

in a little single home with a tiny plot of green about it. Only the lodging-houses approach the tenement plan in any respect, and these are scattered about the entire city, and never converge into one district.

Rochester, with its quarter of a million people, its one hundred different industries, its amazing commercial activity, forever gives the lie to the axiom that poverty necessarily means crowded living. It gives the lie to the axiom that it is impossible to legislate benefactions. Building restrictions, civic foresight, a practical idealism behind the words "Garden City," have combined to rescue this astonishing municipality from the curse of slums.

We returned to the station at last, greatly impressed with our environment (the street-lamps would have rejoiced the Greeks), a little surer of our welcome, but still very uncertain what to do. It was all so new and strange. We felt that we waited on the verge of great discoveries. Yet we had no idea how to proceed.

The Groom's Story

In this predicament we encountered a saving institution — and we made a friend. We saw a sign in the station, "Travelers' Aid," and approached inquiringly. A sweet-faced woman greeted us. We told our story — the book-keeper story — and waited almost with trembling for her denunciation.

"You poor dear," she took Margaret's hands. She turned to me.

"You look strong. I'm sure you can find something to do."

She tore a leaf from her notebook and began to write.

"Here are the addresses of two factory foremen I know; go and see them and tell them I sent you." She thrust the paper into my hand.

"And — yes — wait a minute. I'll telephone to a friend, and see if she will take you to board." She went with a smile to the booth at the far end of the station.

We faced each other in amazement. Roches-

A Honeymoon Experiment

ter had welcomed us and already was endeavoring to find us work and a home! We settled a little more easily into our new rôles. Yet we were not altogether at home. It was like diving into deep water and groping with one's hands among the misty stones that line the bottom of the pool.

We were to find that our story was always accepted without question as in this, the first telling of it. We were universally received as a homeless, jobless couple. Margaret's desire to work was always regarded as genuine. Any ideas that we or our friends may have entertained as to a certain quality of distinction in our bearing, that might perhaps be difficult to hide — such ideas collapsed with alarming suddenness. We were from this time on nobodies, without standing, without influence, without dignity, save that which accrues to any self-respecting tramp. We had no position to conserve. We had no appearances to maintain. We came, at last, fairly to revel in the immeas-

The Groom's Story

urable freedom of our position. We had no obligations whatsoever, except those that we owed to all society and to ourselves. We came and went at any hour of the day or night, well or ill clad, in the blaze of the arc lights or at high noon, and no sense of shame to say us nay! In some respects it was like stepping out of prison.

Miss Welborn came back to us with more addresses — the friend unfortunately could not take us in until later. We thanked her, and came away deeply grateful for the "Travelers' Aid."

We walked uncounted miles that first afternoon following all manner of impulses, as well as the addresses which Miss Welborn had given us. We were introduced to "light-housekeeping" rooms, and knew, even as we were introduced, that here lay our destiny. We walked mainly through the foreign district — Jewish and Italian.

I shall never forget the first house that we

A Honeymoon Experiment

entered. An old gray-haired woman, dirty and disheveled, answered our knock.

“We are looking for rooms,” I said.

She peered at us suspiciously, then with apparent reluctance gave way before our entrance into the dingy hall. There rushed to greet us that faint, stuffy, sourish smell that every house, under a certain minimum of income, seems to possess. The floor was bare, and an uncarpeted stairway led abruptly into an enveloping dimness above.

“I’m filled up,” said the woman.

“You’ve a card in your window.”

“Well, you see, I’m sort of carrying a lady along. She’s got rheumatism. She ain’t paid her rent for six weeks — but I hate to turn her out. Yet, of course, this ain’t no charity bazaar I’m runnin’. Would you like to look at her room?”

“Oh, no!” said Margaret.

“Yes,” said I; and as the poor old dame shuffled her way upstairs I made it plain that we

The Groom's Story

did not propose to take, we only proposed to look. The rheumatic one was out, and we were ushered into her apartment. It was a chaos of dishevelment. Scraps of food, underwear, newspapers, battered crockery swarmed before us. The place was thick with flies. The landlady simply held the door open, making no comment whatsoever. She had evidently passed beyond the age of salesmanship.

“How much?” I said.

“Three dollars.”

If you will believe it, I did not know whether she meant three dollars a day or three dollars a week! Margaret still swears that *she* knew immediately, but this is a point that we have never quite settled.

“We are strangers in town and we’re looking around for rooms. We want to do our own cooking. Of course, we want to see one or two places before we decide.”

“Sure,” said our hostess. “What do you do?”

A Honeymoon Experiment

I looked up inquiringly; then it flashed upon me that of course she meant my job.

“I’m a bookkeeper,” I said.

“Oh”—

There was a certain scorn in her voice as she turned to Margaret.

“You’re workin’, too, lady, ain’t you?” Evidently she did not put her trust in bookkeepers.

“Yes,” said Margaret, somewhat stunned.
“Yes; that is, I’m looking for work.”

“Where you from?” She looked Margaret up and down.

“Boston.”

“Oh!—I might’ a’ known it. That’s what makes you talk so queer!”

We were to find that “Boston” always explained our accent. It was a complete defense in any inquiry as to our articulation.

Meanwhile the horror of that room gained upon us. A loosened blind began to flap wearily against the single unscreened window.

The Groom's Story

"We want to look a little further before we decide," I reiterated.

The landlady appeared relieved.

"I'd hate to turn the lady out. She's so lonesome . . . has n't got a single relative living. Still, I don't believe she'll ever pay me that eighteen dollars." . . .

We left the poor soul mumbling, more to herself than to us, the alternative satisfactions of doing a kindness and of collecting eighteen dollars.

The street, with its double line of trees, was like a breath of paradise. The visit had taught us one thing, very clearly, however. We need have no tremors as to the adequacy of our disguise. The simple fact of our asking for rooms on this income level was evidence enough that we had probably never known anything better.

We invaded many houses with a growing assurance. In one place, the only person who could speak English was a boy ill in bed reading

A Honeymoon Experiment

“Ivanhoe.” In another we were offered a room which served as a highway between the front hall and the kitchen. We began to hear rumors of other than human inhabitants. Once or twice a suspicious eye and nose appeared behind a crack in the door in answer to our ring, and when we voiced our errand, the door was slammed to, in our astonished faces. One bland party admitted us and then openly hinted that all was not as it should be between us. Most of the rooms we saw were incredibly dirty, and littered with all manner of unappetizing fragments. As night drew on, we abandoned our search for furnished “housekeeping” rooms. Frankly, we did not dare accept one without more knowledge.

THE BOARDING-HOUSE

We made our way to one of Miss Welborn’s boarding-houses addresses, and after a rather critical inspection on the part of the landlady we were admitted to the only vacant room the

The Groom's Story

house afforded — a little attic room, hot as only an attic room can be in August.

"It's clean," said Margaret, after a careful scrutiny. That decided us. I went to the station for the bags, and we told the landlady that we should stay for a day or two. We stayed for two weeks as a matter of fact. Pending "light-housekeeping" we made this our headquarters from which our first forages for work were conducted.

The house was of brick, well built, and faced a sunny square where the children played and the jobless dozed on the benches. The park bench is more or less of a barometer of unemployment, and it is significant that all the time we lived at West's boarding-house, the benches were crowded to overflowing.

Mrs. West, our landlady, was a pleasant woman and an indefatigable foe of dirt. Her boarders were largely moving-picture people, together with a trainman, and a drummer or two. The most interesting character of the

A Honeymoon Experiment

household was Harry — a man of forty, who washed the dishes, helped with the laundry, ran errands, marketed, carried slops, made beds, scrubbed floors, washed windows, in fact slaved for fourteen hours a day at every known domestic task, and for it received the princely sum of one dollar and seventy-five cents and sometimes two dollars per week!

We excited no comment among our neighbors. We told our story, but it was too old a story to deserve great attention. They were kind, but had few suggestions to offer. They said that it was difficult to secure work — that was all. It is peculiar how unemployment, like some distant thunder-cloud, began to obscure our horizon even before we had found a place to sleep.

West's proved for us an excellent stepping-stone in the development of our plan. Had we gone immediately into our ultimate quarters, perhaps the change would have been almost too violent. At West's we had a genuinely clean

The Groom's Story

room and tolerable surroundings. True, it was almost impossible to get a bath, and our room was shabby and often unbearably hot, but on the whole we found ourselves among the aristocracy of the working class. We paid nine dollars and a half a week for our room, including breakfast and supper for both of us. This was not cheap, perhaps, but it was at least a tremendous drop from a ten-dollar-a-day hotel. It is strange how quickly we adjusted ourselves to our new position in society. Almost automatically we began to restrict expenses. I remember hovering before the window of a confectioner, seriously debating whether or not I should expend five cents for some very delicious molasses candy that was on exhibition.

LIGHT HOUSEKEEPING

At the end of two weeks we moved to "light-housekeeping" quarters. Margaret had found a landlady whom she felt that she could trust. Our room was in an ancient rookery of a build-

A Honeymoon Experiment

ing in the poorer quarter of the city. One entered through a battered porch, pushed out along a dark and narrow hallway, and turned a door to the left. It gave on a small dark room, perhaps twelve feet square, with two windows fronting a brick wall. Only at noon did one feeble ray of sunshine gild the sash for a moment. One had to light the gas if one wished to read during the day. In a corner was a bed, and beside it a bureau. In the opposite corner a gas cooking-plate rested upon a commode, the under sections of which were filled with a forlorn battery of cooking-utensils. A questionable curtain hid a row of nails and served as a closet. The partition between the wall and the next room was largely a home-made product, whose crazy architecture some greasy papers strove to hide. A pair of extraordinarily dirty net curtains hung in the windows, and there was a general ever-present air of dilapidated drapery.

This room, however, was *clean* in comparison

The Groom's Story

with most of the others that we had inspected. There was no one place that could be called unclean: rather it mouldered; dirt had grown into it like lichens into a cliff.

We felt that here at last we had reached the economic bedrock. We paid three dollars a week for that room with gas included. Usually the "light housekeeper" must feed an inexorable quarter meter. It is difficult for two people to find anything much cheaper than that.

In this house we were to live for over six weeks. In this room we were to sleep, cook our food, eat, read, write, and live — when we were not out of doors, or at work. Here we were to wage our memorable battles against dirt. Here we were to fetch our water from the bathroom on the floor above, carry out our waste, and do our own laundry in the dank, rat-infested cellar below. This was our home.

Our first step was to take every piece of drapery, including the window curtains, out of

A Honeymoon Experiment

the room. Our next step was to substitute our own camping blankets for the very doubtful bed coverings. Finally we gave the entire apartment, including the walls and the furniture, a bath in powerful disinfectant. We toiled equally at this task, and my knowledge of housekeeping began to increase. For the first time in my life I began to find out what taking care of one's self implies.

Our landlady watched these activities with suspicion. I did not blame her. She had grounds, I thought, for being genuinely insulted. I intimated as much to Margaret, but that indefatigable lady was brandishing soapy cloths along the picture moulding, and would not pay the slightest attention to me. But we set ourselves to conciliate our hostess, and in the end she became one of the truest friends we ever made.

To begin with she was a dear. She was young and rather pretty, and had a smile that warmed. By nature she was refined, gentle, lovable, but

The Groom's Story

her work was beginning to tell upon her. Little hard lines would show themselves occasionally at the corners of her mouth. She had been a school teacher, and was the daughter of a clergyman. She had married fairly well, and then suddenly her husband had died on the street of heart failure, leaving her with exactly fifteen cents in her purse and a year-old baby to care for! Almost her first words to me were:—

“Mr. Chase, I hope you have some life insurance.”

In some way she had scraped together the necessary capital to undertake this lodging-house venture, and she was making a stirring fight to keep body and soul together, and to provide for the future of her child.

Our neighbors were varied. In the front room, for the first week of our stay, there lived a minister, his wife, and two children! Four people in one small room, cooking their own meals, eating and sleeping there! Apparently

A Honeymoon Experiment

the immigrant is not the only class that is confronted with a housing problem.

Across the hall lived a carpenter and his wife. She was dying of "Bright's disease," and also, according to the landlady, was slowly starving. The man was of good habits, but he only averaged one day of work in the week due to the dull times in the building trade. He could not afford to buy his wife the good food that her condition demanded. While we were there, their baby died, and the man being away, it was my duty to make the arrangements with the undertaker. It took their last penny, I imagine, to dress the poor little body for the funeral. They kept falling behind in the rent, and finally left one day, to drift on to some even more wretched and inhospitable quarters.

Drifting, drifting, drifting, — lives came and went before us like phantom ships in the night, drifting in from nowhere, drifting out into oblivion.

A workman lived above us with his wife and

The Groom's Story

two children. Her mind was failing, and she was not really fit to care for her children. As a result the older child roamed through the alleys and explored garbage cans much at his own free will. What was worse, everybody distrusted and hated him. He was an incredibly dirty little wretch, to be sure, but it was not fair to load such a burden of hate upon his thin, five-year-old shoulders. With a moron for a mother, and a father away all day, what is a little boy to do? We tried to make friends with him, but it was very difficult. He was like a savage. We tried to induce the father to send him to kindergarten, but up to the time we left we were not successful. It would have been better for Johnny Showitz had he never been born. If you surprised him at his play, he would throw his arms over his head as if somebody were going to strike him.

An old farmer had a room for a time. He gave me the impression in my first talk with him of having retired from active life, his old

A Honeymoon Experiment

age being provided for. This was only his pride. Later I found that he was trying desperately to secure work, and that his meager savings were almost gone.

We were raided by the police one night. A woman of very doubtful reputation had come to the house. At two in the morning a cab driver beat on the door and demanded to see this lady, saying that she owed him some money for cab fares. She bolted herself in her room. The driver went away and presently returned with two policemen. A crowd gathered expectantly. There was an inquiring crack in every lodger's door. The policemen advanced to the attack. They made a hideous racket, but they could not force the door. Then they climbed onto the roof of the porch, but this move, too, proved unsuccessful. The law was in a quandary. The crowd jeered. Finally the landlady, by sheer force of character, brought the hunted one to terms. The latter unlocked her door and gave a note to the driver. Before

The Groom's Story

daylight we heard her creep down the stairs and leave for good and all, but she left her rent money.

More often than not, we made friends among our neighbors. We met them upon a plane of perfect equality. We told our story. Invariably we were met with sympathy, and sincere wishes for better fortune. And often they told their stories to us—stories that made the heart ache. The bitter sieges of unemployment, the wanderings, the illnesses, the accidents, the sorrowings, the partings, and the deaths—all told with an almost unbelievable matter-of-factness.

I sat down beside an old man on a park bench one evening. He was reading the remains of a newspaper under the flickering glare of an arc light. He let his paper slip to the ground and began to talk. In the course of our conversation I asked him where he lived.

“Wherever I hang my hat is my home. I’m partially paralyzed, and nobody wants me now. I used to be a hack driver, but I worked so

A Honeymoon Experiment

many nights washing carriages that — well — finally I could n't work any more. My wife died — just as well, I guess — and this is all there is left of me!" He talked in a dull, beaten monotone — the very dregs of a man from which life had squeezed the heart and soul.

What justice in a world that throws its citizens, aged and paralyzed, upon park benches after demanding their manhood in a long life of ceaseless work? He never asked me for help of any kind, but I sent him to the United Charities — an institution of which he had never heard.

We had a little Jewess to dine with us one night. We had creamed bloater and toast and chocolate, I remember, and altogether a very gay time, and yet when we asked her of her friends she said, "I liked Jack best — gee, I could have learned to love Jack; only a guy got him drunk one night, — he never used to drink himself, — and then he accused Jack of stealing his watch, and Jack shot at the guy, and now I guess I'll never see him again. He'll get ten

The Groom's Story

years, at least. He was only a boy; sort of romantic, you know. He never meant harm to nobody, and—well—he was the whitest friend I ever had—”

Tragedy laid on tragedy, yet all in the day's work! We learned what it meant to live as the average American lives on its income of six hundred dollars a year. We learned, as no book could ever teach us, of the deadly uncertainty of life at that income level. We became acutely aware of the temptations, crimes, abysses that wait just around the corner of that life. And the marvel to us was, and is, not, Why do the poor so often go wrong? but, Why do they not *more often* go wrong?

So long as there is steadiness of employment, there is at least some continuity and some hope in existence. But we found so many cases where there was no steadiness of employment — and so pitifully often it was “laid off” rather than “fired.” Work did not hold, the slender savings were eaten up, the wandering search

A Honeymoon Experiment

went on and on, a child went wrong, a wife sickened and died — over and over again, the same dreary, depressing story.

And yet, under the tragedy moved a deep, vibrant current of good-will, and sympathy, and kindness. I have seen more human cruelty in a single club dance at home than I saw all the time that we lived in Rochester. We would go out upon our poor little apology for a porch and talk for hours with the neighbors. There was a man named Bohm whose conversation used to amaze us. He was going to the dogs by the alcohol route, but how he could talk! — philosophy, history, government, religion, smoking a battered, reeking brier pipe the while and trying to keep his telltale hands from twitching. He was not talking for effect, he was simply a starved soul who used us as a safety valve for the chaos of thoughts that were put within him. Most often, however, the conversation ran along intensely personal lines — work, children, friends, troubles.

The Groom's Story

It is amazing the friendly help that the poor give one another. They assume one anothers' burdens quite as a matter of course. We found no trace of that narrow aloofness that pervades the suburbanite class. If the landlady were away, a boarder was always at great pains to answer the bell, and to exhibit apartments. If a small child were to be left alone for a time, some neighbor would be always glad to take charge of him. If one lacked a quarter for his gas meter, a general call for help, sounded from the front hall, would invariably secure the needed coin. We never felt lonely, we never felt aloof. There is a vast capacity for companionship and sympathy in the soul of the Average Citizen as we found him.

These people — our friends — are not naturally depraved. They are not hereditary bums and loafers. They are our human brothers and sisters with potentialities as great if not greater than our own. Only they have never had a chance. They have never had reasonable op-

A Honeymoon Experiment

portunity. They have been dealt marked cards. Three masters tend to dominate them: Food, Shelter, and Clothing mark the end of all their striving. At the income level of the Average American all expenditures for advancement, for art, music, real recreation, leisure, study, are practically precluded. There is little possibility of achieving those things which to some of us make life really worth the living. Mankind cannot progress unless it has access to those things. Civilization is a farce until the Average Citizen has the economic power to pause for a few moments in his toil, and to question the end of his toiling. "Democracy," "Equality," "Liberty"—all windy and desolate words until the Average Family can raise its eyes and look beyond the wolf that snarls at the door.

As the weeks went by we began to make important discoveries as to ourselves and our surroundings.

First of all we learned what it means to fight dirt. The struggle to keep clean in a house like

The Groom's Story

ours, or in the average tenement, particularly if the building is old, is a strenuous and finally overwhelming one. Of this there is not the least doubt in our minds. One's standards collapse. They must. We found it a question of either staying at home and cleaning all day and (in the case of the Average Citizen) starving; or of working out, and numbing one's self to dirt at home. There is no compromise. It is quite impossible to maintain a decent standard of cleanliness in a dwelling that many other poor people use. No matter how indefatigably one may sweep one's own apartments, the dirt that drifts in from the hallways, the littered alleys, the close-lying streets, the march of one's neighbors and their inquiring children, all combine to furnish an invading army against which no defense is adequate.

We could not keep clean! Had we lived on in our lodgings much longer we should have become as benumbed to dirt and malodorousness as those about us, purely as a matter of *self-*

A Honeymoon Experiment

defense. We came to understand why certain veteran tenement dwellers prefer coal to water in their bathtubs.

We had planned originally to spend our evenings reading or writing in our lodgings. For a week we clung to this programme, and then — suddenly we were aware of huge unseen forces conspiring to hurl us out where there was color, and light, and cheerfulness.

“Good Lord,” said Margaret one night, dropping “Fanny’s First Play” with a bang on the floor (and we are very fond of Shaw) — let’s get out of this. I’m suffocating. Let’s go to the movies.”

We went to the movies. We gulped them down. The little hall was packed with Italians, and ten times as suffocating as our room, but we did not notice it. The pictures thrilled us — the drunken lights, the tin-pan piano, the alternate roars of applause and of horror from the eager childlike audience only heightened the effect. The tawdriness, the vulgarity, the

The Groom's Story

smells, all were lost and forgotten before the gigantic fact that color still shone in the world — that the everlasting gray of our lodging-house had not submerged the universe!

Time and again this happened to us. A hound of desire would seize us and fairly fling us out of our dinginess into some place where there was color and contrast again. It smote us as desire must smite a drunkard. I had never been to the movies on my own initiative before going to Rochester. I have seldom been to them since my return. And yet wild horses could not have kept me away from them there. I slapped down my nickel with my heart surging as it did long ago at circus time, and thrust my way in between a fat Polish lady and an Italian laborer who had had garlic for his dinner, to sit rapt, entranced for hours!

Then there were the parks. I had always tended to be rather patronizing when it came to public parks. I held them estimable enough, perhaps, but common. Never before had we

A Honeymoon Experiment

glimpsed the tremendous outlet that public parks provide for thwarted city populations. It seemed as if we could not wait until Sunday came that we might pack our lunch into a shoe box and invade Seneca, or Highland, or South Park. We explored them from end to end. We reveled in them. They were like bars of sunlight laid athwart a prison floor.

The municipal baths, too, we used constantly and gratefully. It was impossible to get an adequate bath in our lodging. There was no hot water except a small ceremonial amount on Saturday night, and that, owing to strenuous competition, was almost immediately exhausted. I gave up trying, but Margaret forged aloft one Saturday night with high hopes and a clean towel, only to return almost immediately with a look of frozen horror upon her face. I have never been able to persuade her to tell me the details.

We made a point of attending all free concerts, free lectures, and free exhibitions that

The Groom's Story

were announced in the papers. We found that by means of vigilance, application, — and some personal discomfort, to be sure, — we could secure a considerable amount of cultural enjoyment for an astonishingly moderate outlay of cash. This led us to make computations.

We finally decided that for twenty-five dollars a week a young couple could live happily, healthily, progressively, by taking advantage of these low-cost educational and recreational facilities, and by utterly abandoning the attempt to keep up with appearances. As we were living close to ten dollars a week at this time ourselves, we saw what could be done backed by a steady job at moderate wages with wholesome, clean, middle-class quarters. Under this figure (twenty-five dollars), however, the struggle must become increasingly bitter until at the ten-dollars-a-week level, the three masters, Food, Shelter, and Clothing, tend to become supreme. Although we were living for about ten dollars a week, we were buying no clothes

A Honeymoon Experiment

for ourselves and we had no children to support.

When one considers that ten dollars a week is very close to the Average Family wage for America . . .

We did not find it easy to live for this amount. We had literally to count every cent that we expended. A nickel assumed the proportions of a dollar in ordinary intercourse. I limited myself to one five-cent bag of Bull Durham tobacco in the week. We went, perhaps once a week, to the movies. It cost us twenty cents car fare to visit the parks on Sunday. That was the limit of our expenditures for recreation. Everything else went for rent, food, and absolutely necessary car fares. I suppose, all told, we must have walked some hundreds of miles in those nine weeks simply to save car fare. One day by actual computation I walked over twenty miles.

Our food was always wholesome, but it could hardly be called varied. We always breakfasted

The Groom's Story

on fruit and shredded wheat with milk. Cream was an unthinkable luxury. Melons, bananas, and occasionally a peach or a pear were our staples of fruit diet. In the fall we had apples. Lunch we usually ate at a boarding-house where for twenty cents we had a nourishing home-cooked meal. On Sundays there were chicken bones and watery ice cream, and it cost a quarter! Our suppers were cooked at home on the gas plate, and usually were built about a foundation of toast and cocoa — sometimes Campbell's soup — sometimes tomatoes and rice, or green corn, or creamed salt fish. They cost us about ten cents apiece. Margaret was vastly more economical than I. Some ancient thrift in her inheritance surged strongly to meet this crisis. You see, we were trying to live on what we earned, and she sought desperately to succeed. It seemed as if her hand was always on my arm as I reached into my change pocket. I do not think that she bought a piece of candy during the whole time we were there — and she

A Honeymoon Experiment

is very fond of candy! It was always I that backslid. I used to buy peanuts furtively and try and hide the munching of them from her, but she usually unmasked these deceptions with scorn. And I shall never forget one terrible night when an army of cockroaches invaded us, and I got up and dressed and stormed about the room and told Margaret to put on her hat and come with me immediately to the "Seneca" (the leading hotel).

"You quitter!" she said, and turned to repel the invasion.

My indignation collapsed in the face of her resolve and in the end I humbly stuffed rags in the wall as she bade me.

UNEMPLOYMENT

It is a cold October morning with almost a touch of winter in the air. It is barely light and the sky is dull and heavy. The trolleys have not started to run upon the street along which I am hurrying. I walk briskly for two reasons:

The Groom's Story

first, I am cold, and secondly, I am desperately afraid that others will reach 2407 Blank Avenue before me. I pass unending rows of small, flat-roofed shops. There are very few people abroad. A milk wagon is making calls on the opposite side of the street.

Suddenly I hear the steady thud, thud, of footsteps behind me. I quicken my pace, but the footsteps come nearer and nearer. Those footsteps are coming for my job! I am tempted to run, but I realize that that would be cad-dish and unfair. I look around cautiously. A shabby lad — half boy, half man — is coming up behind me with a stern, set face. I stop and wait for him.

He flings a glance at my well-worn suit and battered hat, and says:—

“It looks as if we were going the same way, Bo!”

He slaps the morning paper in his pocket.

I smile, for in my pocket also rests a clipping cut from the “Democrat and Chronicle”

A Honeymoon Experiment

at five o'clock that morning, "Wanted — Men to help in a bakery."

We walk along together in silence. Suddenly about two blocks ahead of us we see a little cloud of men emerge from an alleyway and scatter in all directions. One passes us upon a bicycle, but says nothing.

We both know perfectly well what has happened, but something urges us on to the end. We turn into the small dark alleyway. It leads to a dingy wooden door set in the side of a low dirty brick building. There is a general odor of baking and yeast in the air. Upon the upper part of the door is tacked a sign, scrawled hastily in a large unsteady hand:—

NO MORE MEN WANTED

KEEP OUT

No sound whatsoever comes from the building. A few drops of rain begin to fall.

My companion turns on his heel with a sound halfway between a sob and a curse.

The Groom's Story

"That's a damn long walk for nothing," he says; and then, more slowly, "I'd a hunch I was going to get this to-day — but — aw, what's the use! It's the same old story day after day!" His face sets, hard and sullen.

"How far have you walked?" I asked.

"From Brighton — five miles."

A clock begins to toll six.

Upon graduating from college I entered my father's accounting office. I received no special favors, but I was the "old man's son." There was no evading it. True, I had learned the business from the bottom, but men stood aside to help me learn it. Everything was arranged to break my way. I was lucky, of course, and far from dissatisfied, but I wanted to know how it felt to stand on one's own feet and to face the world alone. This urge was much stronger in me than any desire to gather figures upon the subject of unemployment. In fact I had never questioned, in anticipation, but that I

A Honeymoon Experiment

should find work immediately. What perplexed me was how I should fill a position when I had secured it. Do not think of me, then, as a cold-blooded investigator, anxious to gather lurid impressions. I wanted work and I wanted it badly. I wanted to see what I was good for. I wanted to prove to myself and to my friends at home that I could get a job, and could fill it. I wanted to feel that I was worth something on my own account.

When we arrived in Rochester, we had no idea how to go about finding work. It was part of the game that must be learned. Miss Welborn, you will remember, gave me the addresses of two foremen. Later in the day she advised me to see a certain department-store manager, whose name she mentioned. These were my first clues.

On the morning following our arrival, I left the boarding-house after breakfast and called on all three persons, one after another. Their places of business I found by purchasing an

The Groom's Story

invaluable little street map. At Sibley, Lindsay & Curr's, the department store, I was interviewed by the employing manager in his private office. It was about ten in the morning. He tilted back in his swivel chair and eyed me appraisingly. I was vastly excited! I thought that I had a position as good as secured! After a few searching questions regarding my former employment and my reasons for leaving, he ordered me to fill out an application blank. I did so, and handed the document to him hopefully. He turned to his mail. Without glancing up he said:—

“We have no openings now, I doubt if there will be any before winter. I'll put this application on file. Good-morning.”

I withdrew somewhat dashed, but the street's sunshine brightened me. After all, one could not expect to be successful the first time.

I took a car to the Cluett Peabody Factory. After a long search I found the foreman who knew Miss Welborn. He was a young, clean-cut,

A Honeymoon Experiment

kindly man, anxious to help me. When I spoke of my wife, a look of pain came into his face.

"I have n't got a thing I can give you—not a thing. We're laying men off every day instead of taking them on. You could n't expect to earn over eight or nine dollars a week here anyway. The pay is n't much. I'll sure let you know if anything turns up—but, believe me, it's an awful time to get work."

I thanked him and left.

The second foreman came to me grimy and beaproned from the bowels of a shoe factory. He was a man of fifty-five or more, dark, swarthy, and bespectacled. The name Welborn evidently bore a charm, for he also was decidedly kind to me. His story, however, was the same—men were being laid off—in fact, the whole shop was on half-time and might shut down altogether. He called in the chief clerk and asked if there were any clerical opportunities. The latter shook his head with a smile of utter impossibility.

The Groom's Story

So I was out in the street again, still jobless. I decided to try the private employment agencies. There was no state bureau at that time. I consulted my reference book and directed my steps toward Stearns's "Old Reliable" Agency. It was a long walk from the shoe factory. The room I entered was large and clean. There were chairs about upon which men and women in considerable numbers sagged rather than sat. They were a depressing congregation. I stepped to the desk.

"I'm looking for a job."

"You are not the only one. What can you do?" The clerk eyed me dispassionately.

"I'm a trained bookkeeper and accountant. I can do all kinds of office work, and (this came hard the first time) I'm willing to do anything—work with my hands—anything!"

"There is n't a clerical job in the city. Not one. I could place a good barber. That's all I got."

A Honeymoon Experiment

“Are you liable to have anything later on?”
I inquired meekly.

“No.”

“Do you know where I might inquire from
some one else?”

“No.”

He lost interest in me and picked up his
paper. I was evidently dismissed.

I proceeded to make the rounds of the em-
ployment agencies. Also that first day or two I
tried for newspaper work with every large daily
in the city. I was nowhere welcome. The
agencies were curt, uncivil, and worst of all,
uncommunicative. Their lack of knowledge was
profound. The editors were far — very far —
from requiring enterprising assistants. My ini-
tial enthusiasm began to wane. I came to real-
ize that one could not secure a job by merely
asking for it at polite hours in the morning.
One had to get up early — and think.

I sat down and thought. Then I went to the
Public Library and thought some more — with

The Groom's Story

the great blue city directory in front of me. When I came away I had an alphabetical list of every institution or agency which in any way suggested the possibility of work, or knowledge where work might be found. Relentlessly, one by one, I ran these clues down.

I went to the Chamber of Commerce, well brushed, having surrounded myself with an atmosphere of vast business energy. I was presented with circulars showing in elaborate detail the great prosperity of the city. But the secretary in charge shook his head when I asked to be allowed to contribute to that prosperity. He informed me coldly that the Chamber had no information on the subject of positions.

I went to the Salvation Army. The Major was kind, but overrushed with relief work. He welcomed me to his meetings, but had no idea where a job was to be had.

I went to the Y.M.C.A. They gave me a formidable blank to fill out, which — of course

A Honeymoon Experiment

— I never heard from. It is one of the chief diversions of the unemployed — to fill out blanks expectantly, and then — never to hear from them. My name, character, aspirations, and family history must still be rotting in scores of dusty and forgotten files throughout the city!

I went to the United Charities. The discreet young man in charge offered me unlimited work — volunteer work. When I told him I meant a regular payroll position, his manner changed. He knew of nothing in his organization.

“Do you run an information bureau on the subject?” I inquired.

“No,” he said, considerably to my surprise.

“You have no knowledge of where work may be had in the city?”

“No.”

I went to City Hall and studied the Civil Service lists. A clerical position caught my eye.

“How soon is the examination?”

The Groom's Story

"Not until December."

"Have you any examinations at all in the near future?"

"No."

I went to the City Recreation Department and cited my experience. The director was very kind, but he had no immediate work for me. He hinted at Boys' Club work later on. The pay was very little.

I went to the People's Mission. The manager said that there were at least five thousand men out of employment in the city and that they were sleeping in rows on the mission floors at night.

I went to all the employment agencies again and again. There was no work of any sort for which I was fitted. Occasionally a specialized trade opening, such as cook or carpenter, appeared, but never clerical or manual work. Once I was offered a harvesting position for four weeks on a Canadian farm. The pay was a dollar a day and board. I could not have

A Honeymoon Experiment

taken it without going a hundred miles away, and furthermore I have grave doubts as to my ability as a farmhand. I declined this offer, and it was immediately snapped up by the man next in line.

I went to the Teachers' Bureau. Here I received some encouragement in the form of a tentative position to teach bookkeeping in a night school. Later I was informed that there had been a mistake. The position had already been filled. I was, of course, barred from all public-school positions, because I lacked a teacher's license.

In the end my careful planning and thinking came to nothing. There was apparently no place in the entire city which could intelligently dispense information about the possibilities of employment. The streets swarmed with the jobless, but nobody knew anything about it officially.

Finally I was driven back to the papers. For the entire time that we remained in Roch-

The Groom's Story

ester, never a morning went by that Margaret and I did not go over every single item of "Help Wanted — Female" and "Help Wanted — Male" in the columns of the "Democrat and Chronicle." The paper came to us at four or earlier in the morning, and very often we would get up, light the gas, and blue-pencil our opportunities, if there were any, before the day had fairly dawned. If a reasonable chance appeared, we would dress, eat a cold, hasty breakfast of cereal and milk, and leave before six. It was hopeless to attempt to secure any position after that hour. One comes to appreciate that phrase of the learned economists — "competition among wage-earners."

Our routine seldom varied — an early breakfast, a list of possible jobs, the city map, and car fare. We would say good-bye at the lodging-house steps, and go our separate ways. At noon we met in a twenty-cent restaurant to talk over the morning's adventures. For the first few weeks our stories were largely identical — a

A Honeymoon Experiment

long hunt for the factory, a waiting line of eager applicants, occasionally an interview, with its inevitable climax — “turned down,” or “too late,” or “we want more experience,” or “we hired all the people we wanted yesterday.” Time after time an advertisement was allowed to run for two days when all the positions it offered were filled before six o’clock on the morning of the *first* day. So cheaply is labor regarded, so great the competition, that the employer tends completely to lose sight of the human cost of his neglect — cost measured in needless walking, and car fare, and at the end, needless disappointment.

There was no position, that I felt I was in any way competent to fill, for which I did not try. Furthermore, I wrote over thirty letters in answer to newspaper advertisements. I received just two replies; one offering a clerkship at six dollars a week, which I did not answer; one offering another clerkship (at an unmentioned, perhaps unmentionable, salary), which

The Groom's Story

had been taken when I came to telephone for it.

Toward the end of our stay, I became so weary of writing unanswered letters that out of curiosity I myself put two shameless advertisements into the paper; one calling for "a man able to use and keep his head," the other for "a good bookkeeper." To the former I received thirty-two replies, and to the latter thirty-nine. I wish that I could print some of these letters just as they came to me. They form a mosaic of wretchedness and defeat. Those from the older men — men who had held important offices in former years — were the most pathetic. One man had been the chief auditor of a transcontinental railroad. Another had been editor of a well-known newspaper!

In all I applied for nearly one hundred specific positions, and with the exceptions already stated, I never secured any sort of an opening in a single one of them! The nearest approach to a real opportunity that I had was as motor-

A Honeymoon Experiment

man for the street-railway company. At the car barns I was offered a job, but as the uniform cost eighteen dollars to begin with, besides the fee for a union card, and as one's period of apprenticeship without tangible earnings was of some months' duration, I let this golden moment pass. So would any one without twenty-eight dollars and with the need of immediate returns.

We had been in Rochester perhaps two weeks when I opened the paper one morning to find the following:—

“Wanted — Man for bowling alleys.”

I ran my pencil under the type hopefully. I had bowled. I knew how to set up pins. This was the most promising opportunity that had yet presented itself. I reported at the address named at a little after seven in the morning. The janitor told me to come back at noon. At noon a clerk told me to see the alley boss at four. At four o'clock the alley boss told me to come at seven. At seven the same gentleman, mounted upon his throne, where he

The Groom's Story

scored the bowlers, told me to stay, to watch the boys "set 'em up," and possibly at nine o'clock, when the shift changed, he would give me a job. I watched them "set 'em up"—by a rather ingenious machine instead of by hand. I watched until every motion was clean and clear in my mind. I wanted this—my first job! I wanted it badly. I could feel excitement surging up in me as nine o'clock approached. I did not care if the pay was only twelve and a half cents an hour. I did not care if I earned only enough for "a cup of coffee and a flop for the night," as one of the other aspirants put it. I did not care how menial the task. I was sick and tired of looking for work. I wanted to do something. I was vibrant with strange repressed emotions. At nine o'clock a gong sounded. The men filed out of their places, and the fresh crew filed in. All twelve alleys were almost instantly filled. Some half-dozen of us remained. The alley boss lit another cigarette — "Nothin' doin', boys."

A Honeymoon Experiment

We went out in the night. For an hour I walked the streets bitterly resentful, and angry clean through. All day my hopes had been kindled and rekindled. I had been ruthlessly stimulated to a crisis which collapsed when the hour came. I shook myself out of the mood at last, but I realized that night how anarchists are made.

“Wanted — Janitor and bottlewasher.”

At six o’clock in the morning I was on hand at the address named in the above advertisement. It was a gaunt factory building toward the center of the town. I found thirty-eight men ahead of me. We waited four hours; the crowd increased to fifty or sixty. Nobody was interviewed. No word came from the sullen, battered door around which we pushed. Finally a clerk emerged on an errand. As an apparent afterthought he turned and spoke to one of us.

“No use you waiting around. The job’s filled long ago.”

The Groom's Story

It had been filled — filled from the inside, and the manager had not had the common decency to let us know. There is no telling what that long fruitless wait may have cost some needy man. So often this happened to me — long, dragging waits, and then not even an interview for any of the applicants. The position had been quietly filled from within. I remember being almost suffocated in a mad rush of clamoring theater "supes" one afternoon, and then, after hours of swirling about the stage doors, — hundreds of us, — it appeared that the "twenty young men" needed had all been picked that morning! It would have filled a German statistician with joy to compute the fruitless miles traveled that afternoon by those hundreds of boys and men!

Despite the almost desperate drives we sometimes made for a door, there never was any elbowing or trying to forge in front of the next man unfairly. It seemed to be an unwritten law of the unemployed that every applicant

A Honeymoon Experiment

should have his chance. There were no hard looks directed to newcomers, no attempt at monopoly. I never saw an unemployed man handle another roughly. Rather they talked together, often jested in a grim, pathetic way, compared notes, and commented upon the European war. It is strange and gripping to see men, on the verge of starvation and despair, imbued with a certain fine sense of courtesy and fellowship!

I answered an advertisement calling for "two laborers." I found the work to consist in carrying fifty pounds of slate up ladders on a church steeple. The wage was eight dollars a week. I talked, as always, with my fellow applicants. There were perhaps twenty gathered. One tall, clean-cut, neatly dressed man interested me particularly. He looked a gentleman. I asked him what he was doing at this place. This was his story:—

He had held a good clerical position with the

The Groom's Story

Eastman Kodak Company. Owing to dull times he had been laid off together with over a *thousand* other workers. He had tried desperately to secure a new position ever since. In all the eight weeks of his searching, he had been employed for only one day's scrubbing upon his hands and knees! He had almost no money left. He told me of a wife and child at home. As he spoke of them his face hardened and these words flashed from him:

“God! what is the world coming to?”

He is the spokesman for millions of human beings.

A little later they told us that no more men were wanted, and I watched my friend go bitterly down the street — thinking, no man knew what black and somber thoughts. I found his kind everywhere, steady, reliable, clean-spoken men, beaten back from the clerical field and trying at last for any sort of manual or menial labor.

A Honeymoon Experiment

“Wanted — Men to pick pears on Monday morning.”

This advertisement appeared in the paper on Saturday. I decided to forestall my competitors by applying immediately and registering my name in advance. The address was that of a suburban town. I took a trolley to the end of its route, walked four miles on a hot and dusty road, and came at last to a big white farmhouse. I went to the back door and knocked. A florid man in shirt-sleeves answered.

“I understand you want pickers on Monday,” I said.

“Sorry, son,” he replied; “we’ve got our men, and turned away a hundred more already!”

I might multiply these incidents indefinitely, but it would be largely reiteration — thirty, fifty, one hundred men for every position, and in many cases the work disappearing through some hidden mechanism within. There was nothing so useless, so utterly unwanted, in

The Groom's Story

the city of Rochester as our army, thousands strong, that got up in darkness on a summer morning to read the paper, and to walk the town from end to end in search of gossamer butterflies. What wonder men degenerate under the pressure of this continual defeat and failure! What wonder their courage sinks, their moral inhibitions collapse, and that they grow sullen, bitter, and at last unemployable. I have no great love for the sodden and the outcast, but step by step I have seen them made under the pitiless mould of continued unemployment. I have watched them come eager and hopeful in the morning, confident in the sunshine and in their ability to succeed; and I have talked with them beaten and bitter under the arc lights at night.

There were, however, two avenues open to me in which I might have secured unlimited work. The first was known as "business opportunities" in the columns of the press. These opportunities made alluring copy, but they

A Honeymoon Experiment

sold from one hundred dollars up. In fine, it took a capitalist to enjoy them. I interviewed a number of these brilliant hopes, not because I had money to throw away upon them, but because I wished to find out what they meant. One suave gentleman offered me a sure five thousand dollars a year in exchange for five hundred dollars down. He merchanted an unknown but potent "Bug Killer." Another brisk and nervous person offered to collaborate with me (for a consideration) in the production of the unborn "Liberal Weekly"—a sheet designed to protect the liquor interests of the city from such untimely onslaughts as had been recently launched by the W.C.T.U., the Anti-Saloon League, the Suffragists, etc. He had many hundreds of paid-up subscriptions, and yards of prepaid advertising space—but as yet he had no copy. If I had had six months before me, I believe I should have taken this offer. It had enlightening possibilities.

The Groom's Story

The second avenue that always beckoned was that of selling agent. The opportunities in this field were numberless. The reason was simple. No salaries were paid. All compensation was on the commission basis. For a week, by way of experience, I tried to sell real estate lots by means of door-to-door canvassing. I sold no lots (though I left a big list of "prospects" as a legacy to my successor), but I accumulated considerable experience. I was made acutely aware of the psychology of salesmanship as practiced by the typical "agent." I found that the end, the aim of his life is to *sell* — seldom to please, seldom to provide some rational object for a rational human need. The supreme achievement is to force some unwanted article upon an individual against his slowly decreasing objections. I attended a "selling talk" one night in the office of the company with which I was connected. It was a vile and cowardly affair. One after another, the salesmen, with manifest pride, arose and

A Honeymoon Experiment

told of the various tricks by which they had taken advantage of human nature, and trapped their "prospects" into buying something which they, the prospects, neither wanted nor needed.

I encountered the selling army at every turn. It was recruited from middle-class boys, presumably of a high-school education, too proud to learn a trade. It was a life that fairly splintered the props of character — unsteady, wandering, hourless, with a premium upon the art of taking unfair advantage of human nature. It was an uncanny revelation to me — these hundreds of drifting young men engaged in wringing a living from the community by hanging like leeches upon the selling organism. I went time and again to answer advertisements for "agents," and whether the commodity was crayon portraits or automatic curling tongs, the same shifty young men always surrounded me. The rank and file of the unemployed never invaded this field. They left it clear to the unfortunate persons whose specialty it was.

The Groom's Story

I want to drive home, if I can, the utter chaos which I encountered in the field of information. Nobody knew how many unemployed there were, or what the industrial possibilities were, or what the harvesting possibilities were, or where to go to get information. A great darkness reigned over the whole question.

I cannot begin to express the help and aid that a Government Labor Exchange, equipped with reliable information, would have been to both Margaret and myself. One pictures a spacious, airy office, where one receives courteous attention (as they do in Germany); where attendants preside over neat files and forms; and where, best of all, definite information regarding the situation as a whole, intrastate and interstate, is available. What a Godsend to the crowding, pushing, battered mass that chases one will-o'-the-wisp after another through an almost fathomless night! More information, facts, knowledge,—these are the primary and

A Honeymoon Experiment

urgent needs in pursuing the struggle against unemployment.

After labor exchanges we must have unemployment insurance as it has been successfully applied in England and Germany. These measures, together with regularization of industry, government works in non-competitive fields such as afforestation, will go very far toward eliminating the problem of unemployment.

There are to-day approximately four million¹ jobless men in America, the great majority of whom are eager, even desperate for work. Even in the best of times this army will number well over a million. Men are not out of work because they are shiftless. They are out of work because modern industry demands a roving, mobile, easily liquidated working population. It is this requirement that is responsible for most of the resulting shiftlessness. Consider the harvesting period, for instance. Hundreds of thousands must be mobilized for

¹ This was written in the spring of 1915.

The Groom's Story

a few weeks to gather the crops. But when winter comes, what are the thousands, now idle, to do? Some will go to the lumber camps, but this again is a seasonal occupation. With the coming of the spring, where are the winter workers to go? What kind of a family life can such a wanderer have? What chance has he to form habits of steadiness and thrift? On and on he wanders. There is no regularity in modern industry. Seasonal changes throw literally millions out of work. Fashions are responsible for vast labor fluctuations. Christmas rushes, summer shut-downs, spring trade, fall trade,— all mean enormous pay-roll variations. A moment's reflection upon industry as it really is should convince any one, outside of an insane asylum, that the chaotic disorder of American methods of production, rather than the personal character of the American workman, is to blame for unemployment and its ensuing evils.

The unemployed, instead of being bums and

A Honeymoon Experiment

loafers, are in reality the saviors of American industry. Without their spasmodic help in the busy seasons, we should be unable as a nation to produce a half of what we now produce. We have to face, in my opinion, either these self-evident facts or a revolution. There is a limit to human endurance.

I append a table showing a statistical summary of my search for employment.

Summary of Employment Campaign

<i>Jobs applied for</i>	<i>In person</i>	<i>By letter</i>
“Men wanted”.....	11	4
Clerks.....	7	18
Farm work.....	5	..
Bookkeeper.....	4	3
Newspaper work	4	2
Laborers.....	3	..
Bell boy	1	..
Pin boy	2	..
Motorman	1	1
Waiter	1	..
Janitor	1	..
Detective.....	1	..
Dishwasher	1	..

The Groom's Story

Soda-fountain clerk	2	..
Exposition work	2	..
Bakery	2	..
Hotel clerk.....	1	..
Usher in movies.....	1	2
Clothes model	1	..
Theater supe	2	..
Furniture moving	2	..
Chauffeur	2	1
Office manager	2
Advertising work	1
Window trimmer.....	..	1
	—	—
	57	35

Total applications for specific jobs, 92.

It must be remembered that not all of these jobs were open. In many places I walked in at random and inquired for work.

“Business opportunities” investigated:

- Insect destroyer.
- Milk-shake-patent process.
- “Liberal Weekly.”
- Shoe store.
- General merchandise store.

A Honeymoon Experiment

“Agent” work investigated:—

Real-estate lots.

“Book of Facts.”

Crayon portraits.

Insurance.

Patent washers.

Patent specialties.

Institutions visited:—

- (1) All the employment offices.
- (2) Young Men’s Christian Association.
- (3) United Charities.
- (4) City Hall.
- (5) Teachers’ Agency.
- (6) Civil Service Commission.
- (7) Chamber of Commerce.
- (8) Business Exchange.
- (9) Salvation Army.
- (10) People’s Mission.

EMPLOYMENT

I did get work finally—and I saved my pride. But I did not get it by applying for it: quite the reverse. A friend whom I made in the boarding-house approached me one day and asked if I would look over his accounts. I did

The Groom's Story

so, and he ended by giving me charge of his books at twenty-five cents an hour. It was spasmodic labor. In all I earned about forty dollars, or an average of less than five dollars a week for our entire stay. Not much, perhaps, but when I came to go, I was rewarded by my patron's telling me that he had planned to "keep me busy all winter" at steadier rates. I had found a niche in the industrial order, but, strangely enough, it had come to me as a personality; I had not gone to it as an applicant. I saved my pride, but I did not succeed in getting the kind of work I had anticipated. I might have remained months longer, and still not have succeeded. I happened to fall into this fortuitous opportunity, and I realize now how lucky I was to get anything at all.

AND FINALLY

In the midst of our adventure we were forced to leave it. We had come to the end of even the most generous honeymoon allowance. We

A Honeymoon Experiment

had stayed over eight weeks and it was well on into the fall. Our room was often uncomfortably cold. We used to boil hominy on the gas burner, filling the place with steam in an endeavor to keep warm. One day, when Margaret was working, even this heroic method failed to keep me from shivering as I wrote, and finally in desperation I left that clammy little room and went to the railway station, and sat for hours on a bench reveling in the public warmth! I can never see a dirty, cold-looking man pushing into a station waiting-room without remembering that day — and sympathizing with him.

On the morning before we left we sat down quite soberly to talk it all over. You have no idea how difficult it was to get a perspective upon the whole matter. We had been caught in such a pressure of immediate personal circumstances.

“Let’s not go home,” said Margaret, gazing ruefully at her “going-away” trousseau suit, hung on the gas jet in readiness for departure.

The Groom's Story

"Let's stay here and be free and unconventional and — and *human* for ever and ever!"

"In this room," I asked, "for ever and ever? Could you stick it out?"

"No," said Margaret soberly; "I don't suppose I could stick it out — in this room — for ever and ever."

Our eyes wandered over the battered furniture, the peeling plaster, the stained ceiling, the unwashed tin dishes.

"How long could we stick it out?" I mused.

We debated that. We faced the facts frankly, discounted for the touch of romance and adventure that had borne us through, and concluded as follows:—

If we had been genuinely faced with the necessity of living through an indefinite future in the same manner that we had lived for the past six or seven weeks, we should undoubtedly have chosen not to live at all!

We, a fairly tolerant, fairly democratic woman and man, not oversensitive as to sounds

A Honeymoon Experiment

or smells or dirt, should have chosen to cease to live rather than to go on living as the average American must live! Robbed of the spirit of adventure (and what adventure is there for the Average Citizen?) that living would have degenerated for us into a long, horrible nightmare! Perhaps this flat statement will dimly suggest the tragic difference between the way some of us are brought up to live and the way that most of us apparently must live.

But it is all so ridiculous!

People do not have to live like that. There is no inexorable law to which they must conform. There is enough and more than enough to go 'round. The whole population of the world could live in the State of Texas and give half an acre to a family. The whole world could be fed on Canadian wheat-fields alone. The earth is groaning with the good things of life — waiting, yearning to give them to us. Only we do not understand how to distribute them. To him that hath, we satiate the more, and to

The Groom's Story

him that hath not, we continually take away, and the result lies smouldering there in Rochester.

When are the intelligent educated people of this country going to cease sermonizing about the unworthiness of the lower classes, cease burying their heads in the sands of charity and relief work, and sit down like rational human beings and help the poor to think their way out of this idiotic breakdown in the machinery of distribution? Some of them, fortunately, have made a beginning. Henry George was one of the pioneers. If we had the Single Tax in full operation to-day, in twenty years I believe that there would not be such a thing as a problem of poverty remaining in America!

We said good-bye to our friends (our landlady wept), and half sorrowfully, half gladly, boarded the train that was to carry us back to the old ordered way of living. We sat quite silently in the coach watching the remembered streets and squares and buildings flash into

A Honeymoon Experiment

view and fade into the distance of what was to be only a half-exhilarating, half-tragic memory.

Suddenly Margaret looked away from the fading city and met my eyes. I remember so well the earnestness of the question that came from her: —

“Do you think we can ever make them understand — all this?”

“We’ll try,” I said.

And we have.

Part II
The Bride's Story



Part II — The Bride's Story

I BELIEVE that the most significant—and the most impersonal—moment in my life occurred some three years ago, when a statement of cold statistical fact quietly intruded upon my rather conventional, and decidedly comfortable, view of life. The fact was this: Ninety-two per cent of the women in the United States do their own housework. Only eight per cent of them are financially able to employ servants!

The atmosphere in which I had lived, visited, and done my thinking, represented less than ten per cent of the national point of view! To be sure, I had often been told that half the world does not know how the other half lives. But to have one "half" jump to ninety-two per cent and the other half dwindle to eight per cent! Gradually there crept into my startled consciousness, driving, insistent voices. The Average Family wage in America is six hundred

A Honeymoon Experiment

dollars. You spend that amount on your mere personal wants. Sixty per cent of the wealth in your United States is owned by two per cent of the people. There are always a million men out of employment in your prosperous country — often more — For the first time in my life I began to think.

Now, the Bride's story is not so very different from the Groom's story. Mostly it was an experience of glorious comradeship and equality. But there are situations in which the eight or nine million working-women find themselves which do not always exist for their brother workers. And it is those problems in employment and unemployment which I wish to try and make a living reality, for the women (and men) who have been so unfortunate as to know life from only one angle.

TRAMPING THE STREETS

I had always rather pitied the women who had not known the protection of a father, or

The Bride's Story

a husband, or an income. And in shopping I had been vaguely uncomfortable at the marked abyss between my leisured buying and the often tired and listless selling on the part of the girl across the counter. Sometimes, as I waited for a package, and heard her mechanically answering her next customer, —

“No, ma’am — they’re not guaranteed color fast,”

“Three aisles down on the left,”

I used to try to imagine myself facing the monotony of it, six days a week, fifty weeks a year, for the reward of six or possibly eight dollars a week. My imagination had never been able to encompass the relentless necessity of it — I simply could not conceive myself facing that dull sameness day in, day out, year in, year out. Meanwhile the greater tragedy of desperately needing, but not procuring the opportunity, to work, had not occurred to me.

I remember so well our first morning at the boarding-house breakfast table. We opened the

A Honeymoon Experiment

daily paper and turned immediately to the “Help Wanted” column. When we heard our landlady’s steps approaching, we rustled hastily to the war news. We were ashamed to be caught looking for work! By surreptitious peeping, however, I found an advertisement inserted by a paper-box company. “Girls Wanted” and I took down the address, determined to make this my first application.

I was a little breathless when I said good-bye to Stuart, but my hopes ran high. I made my way across the park with its burdened benches, and so on to Main Street. A fat and kindly policeman directed me to one of the more dingy side streets. I walked between innumerable workshops and factories, and only came to my number when I had reached the very end of the street. I kept wondering whether the people I passed knew that I was going to get a job in a paper-box factory! It seemed as though my whole being flamed with the information!

I passed before a dim and ancient door with

The Bride's Story

a sign over it from which two letters were missing. I paused and stared at the number. That first entrance took courage! I started up the winding wooden stairs which led to some still more narrow and creaking, and those to an even more fire-trap flight ending in the Paper-Box Factory. I entered the work-littered quarters, a chaos of glue and boxes and scurrying women. At first no one seemed to notice me, as I stood waiting, apologetically. Then a brisk, sandy-haired man, evidently in authority, approached, and I ventured to tell him that I had come in answer to an advertisement in the paper.

"Have you ever worked in a box factory before?"

"No, I have n't, but —"

"Nothin' doin'" — he turned away.

"But I —" I was talking to a vanishing back, and exit was the only cue. By the time I reached the street, philosophy had restored my courage, and I boldly entered two other box

A Honeymoon Experiment

factories on my way back to Main Street. In each I was told briefly that no help was needed, and for a few blocks I allowed myself to feel that I had done my job-seeking duty for the day.

After a little more trudging and silent argument, however, I entered a laundry office; only to be turned away when I admitted that I had done merely "private washing." Then I bearded the manager of a spectacle factory in his den — an office fairly bristling with efficiency — and found that all dens are not inhabited by lions. He was a very pleasant person, and hospitable enough to assure me that it was "very dull times." I can still remember my gratitude for that little personal overture. But now the excitement and novelty of my situation were beginning to wear off, and I was feeling a little weary under the pressure of my effort. The term "sheltered woman" was beginning to signify new and unsuspected things, but I shunned its appeal and forced myself on. When at last I met Stuart at the appointed

The Bride's Story

restaurant for luncheon, I had several other adventures to describe to him, visits to a dirty grocery store, Cluett's attractive factory, and a cheap clothing store: all to the rhythm and dawning realization of the meaning of those words—"Tramping the streets." I was almost too tired to eat.

In the next two weeks I was to apply for ninety-two positions, covering everything from floor-scrubbing to clerical work in offices. For instance I answered an advertisement inserted by a cutlery factory one morning, with the following success:—

"I am answering your advertisement in the paper."

"You should have been here an hour ago. The places were all taken at six-thirty."

The next morning I saw the same advertisement, and supposing that more girls were needed I spent another ten cents for car fare.

"Are all the places filled, which you advertised in this morning's paper?"

A Honeymoon Experiment

“Yes, they were all filled yesterday, but we always run the ‘ad’ three days!”

I answered one laundry advertisement at six o’clock in the morning, and received the information that they had decided not to take the names until the next day. The gruff manner of the boss made me quite determined to investigate further, and the next morning I forced myself out of bed at five o’clock into the rain and out again to the laundry six miles away.

“I’ve come again to answer yesterday’s advertisement.”

“Well, I filled the places yesterday — don’t need any more of you now.”

That twenty-cent car fare and those two wasted mornings did not mean to me food, or clothing, or rent. But they meant, nevertheless, a very real resentment, and a new glimpse up the road of social unrest.

Of the employers with whom I came in contact, perhaps their axiom was summed up for me by the manager of a moving-picture show.

The Bride's Story

He was very portly, very suave, and very, very, wise. As we sat in his unkept little office, he eyed me knowingly, and I can see now the amused smile which amplified the fat creases in his face when I told him that, because of my musical education, I thought I should be worth ten dollars a week as accompanist. His answer was terse:—

“It is n’t a question of what you are worth. It’s a question of how much you’ll work for.”

I give this phrase without comment as an answer to certain modern employers who insist that they always pay their help what they are worth.

My unemployment lasted for two weeks, although there were in that time several jobs which I might have had, had they not precluded themselves for my particular situation. For instance, I could have been “help girl” in a bakery. Its foulness, its fly-covered wares, its suffocating stuffiness are still indelibly photo-

A Honeymoon Experiment

graphed on my mind. And the greasy, perspiring woman in charge — the incredible dirtiness of the apron she wore!

“How much do you pay?” I asked.

“Five a week.”

“Are the hours long?”

“Seven in the mornin’ till seven at night.”

“Saturdays, too?” I inquired meekly, almost apologetically.

“Saturdays *and* Sundays. This is a bakery, not a pleasure resort.”

I came away gasping.

I could have been an accompanist for a traveling circus troupe, who lived under canvas during the country-fair circuit and offered me eight dollars a week.

“You gotta play all day two days a week. The rest of it ain’t so bad.”

I feel that I ought to make it clear at this point that my contact with employers was for the most part in smaller and less well-known concerns. In Sibley, Lindsay & Curr’s, for in-

The Bride's Story

stance, they were discharging rather than employing help — and all that I was able to do there was to make out an application blank. At Eastman's Kodak Factory it was the same story. But I did have there a pleasant interview with the shrewd and capable business woman who engages the hundreds of women employed every year in that gigantic, well-lighted plant. I went to her, recommended by a personal friend of hers, a doctor, with whom I had become acquainted, and received a most distinct impression of a firm giving fair treatment to its employees. To my disappointment, however, I was unable to talk with any of the employees themselves.

In the daily round of interminable applications, the few opportunities available did not seem very important, or very encouraging. Mostly my interviews ran like this:—

“I've come to answer your advertisement for packing shoes in boxes.”

“Ever done it before?”

A Honeymoon Experiment

“No, but I know how to use my head and keep it.”

“We want experienced help.”

“I could learn very quickly, and perhaps soon do better than —”

In all the countless times I made that plea for mental capacity, only one employer ever seemed to consider the possibility of inexperienced hands, with brains, becoming shortly more efficient than experienced hands with less brains. Constantly I felt that what the employer wanted was not brains, not potential skill, but a human machine — who would do the work at less than a living wage.

If only I might convey, to those who have never experienced it, one thousandth part of the utter weariness, the discouragement, the sense of worthlessness which comes with this unsuccessful “Tramping the streets.” Here was I,— not dependent for subsistence on the outcome of my search,— yet victim to a sense of beaten, subdued futility, a sense of inferior-

The Bride's Story

ity, of uselessness in the whole industrial world. I had not realized how completely my self-confidence had been submerged, until one day I did what I must always do in any city — I went to the Suffrage Headquarters. There I offered my services while I was out of work, and I was sent to speak at a meeting outside of Rochester. For the first time in ten days or more, I was no longer a nonentity—I was again a personality — with something in me which I could give out to other people. I cannot even suggest the relief which came to me.

. . Is it any wonder that after weeks and months of discouragement, the "unemployed's" pride and initiative are killed? That the unemployed becomes unemployable?

"If a man gets out of work, he goes 'round getting shabbier and shabbier, until people say he's a bum, — and he can't get back," so one of my subsequent fellow employees summed it up. A vicious circle: unemployment breeding shabbiness, shabbiness breeding unemployment.

A Honeymoon Experiment

IN THE EMPLOYMENT OFFICES

I went faithfully to the various private employment offices, and, with one exception, received decidedly questionable treatment. The bureau I visited most often gave me, upon the deposit of a dollar, three cards to situations which had already been filled when I applied for them. I called at the office ten consecutive days (having left the boarding-house telephone number the first day), and at the end of that time I asked for my dollar back, according to the agreement, when no position was obtained. To my astonishment the woman in charge replied:—

“You remember that first restaurant I gave you a card to?”

“Yes.”

“Well, they telephoned me right afterward that you refused to take the job.”

“You know that’s not true,” I challenged. She shifted her attack.

The Bride's Story

"Well, anyway, I've done fifty cents' worth of advertising for you."

"Where have you advertised?"

"In the papers," — fiercely.

"In what paper?" I insisted.

"In the papers, I tell you."

I observed that I had seen no such advertisement, and I had watched closely every day. And then she turned on me:—

"See here, I'm not going to be questioned by the like of you. You can take fifty cents or nothing at all, and you can take it now and get out. . . . Give me that receipt."

"But this receipt is for one dollar."

"Give it to me or you won't get even fifty cents, and I will have you *put out* in a minute."

Trembling with anger I gave her the dollar receipt. I was too enraged to think of anything else to do. Angry as I was at the individual injustice, my real and abiding anger has been for the helpless job-seekers whom that trick has deprived of the actual necessities of life.

A Honeymoon Experiment

At another employment office I found that the far from irreproachable person in charge made a practice of extorting two or three dollars from both employee and the employer when she filled a position. Not a moderate charge, but at least a frank procedure. Usually her next step, however, was to inform the maid who had filled the position for a week or more that a very much better position was now open to her. By dint of which Mrs. Bohn received another fee from the maid, and another pair of fees in refilling the first position.

I can see rows and rows of those victims now — those job-seekers — their hopeless, discouraged, subdued faces. And I can hear the trembling voice of one old man, not a day under seventy-five years of age, as he held out his emaciated hands to the office manager —

“Can’t you give me something to do? Anything, — I’ll do anything.”

The Bride's Story

SECOND-MAID INTERVIEWS

For a time I applied for second-maid positions, and could have had two of these or any number of general housework places. I wished to learn, at first hand, the attitude of women who employ servants toward those servants. I confined myself to interviews only, for I felt that I should not be justified in making my would-be employer show me her ways for the very limited time I could serve her.

The most fair-and-square and really delightful treatment which I received in an interview was in a Jewish household — one of the positions I might have had. The daughter of the house answered the bell when I rang.

“I saw an advertisement for second maid in this morning’s paper,” I said, a bit tremulously.

“Oh, yes — Mother,” she called, “there’s a young lady here to see you.”

A pleasant-faced, genial woman came into the room.

A Honeymoon Experiment

"How do you do—don't stand, please.
Have you walked way out here?"

"No, I took a car, ma'am."

"And have you done second work before?"

I handed her my shameless self-written recommendation.

"That's a very nice recommendation, Margaret; and now I want to tell you about our household."

She sketched a very normal and not unreasonable plan of work, adding that she paid five dollars a week.

Clearly I could not have inconvenienced such a frank and charmingly democratic person, even had I been so determined.

"I'm sorry," I said perspiring, "but I don't feel I could work for less than six dollars a week."

"I'm sorry, too, Margaret, for I should like to have you stay here with us. I can't pay more than five dollars, though, so I am afraid

The Bride's Story

we shall have to part. Before you go would n't you like a glass of water, or milk — it's so hot?"

Out on the street again I found myself ruminating — if all women treated their servants as she did me, there probably would n't be a servant problem.

But all women do not. I really enjoyed more the interview with a certain handsome, steely-eyed woman who treated me as only an underbred, overdressed person can. She asked me questions with that delicacy of feeling which the horse-trader displays in examining an animal whose merits he doubts.

"You're not very tall, are you! — My rooms are high, and the ceilings have to be cleaned regularly."

"I'm stronger, perhaps, than I look," I replied.

I then asked about the wages — and was told that they were five dollars a week, in view of which munificence, only one afternoon every

A Honeymoon Experiment

other week was allowed "off." Apologetically I inquired about the second maid's room.

"You have a room all to yourself," she said with a defiant stare.

"Is it well lighted?" I asked.

"It has n't many windows," she admitted.

"Has it — any windows?" I ventured.

"No — but you can just leave the door open and get plenty of air from the hall and the room opposite."

Perhaps these conversations will serve as the two poles between which my interviews varied.

In my experience the balance was, I try to think, about even, between those who met me on a respectful and unhumiliating ground, and those who frankly treated me as an inferior. And yet granting the fairest treatment there is ever that indefinable mental atmosphere, that perhaps unconscious admission of a stigma attached to the position of "servant."

"Well, if girls really want to work, they can always get general housework. I don't under-

The Bride's Story

stand why girls prefer to work in factories when they can have a good home and domestic work."

How often we have heard this.

My answer is — Try both kinds yourself and learn why. I submit that not only would the factory be my preference, but it would be the preference of the normal woman, with the human qualities of self-respecting independence and liberty, bred in our American life. There are comparatively few families in my personal range of acquaintanceship for whom I would willingly perform domestic service. There are none to whom I would give up my entire time with the exception of one afternoon a week, and to whom I would sacrifice my evenings, my Sundays, and my opportunity for social intercourse.

Until "housework" recognizes the factors in industrial work, which make the latter so much more attractive than domestic labor as it is now arranged, the best workers will continue to

A Honeymoon Experiment

sacrifice the advantages of that much emphasized "good home" for the greater rights, privileges, and freedoms of women in industry. We may be loath to admit this at first (and perhaps for some time), but come to it we must. I only ask that one open-mindedly consider the present disadvantages of housework as summed up by C. Helene Barker in her most helpful little book, "Wanted — Young Woman to Help with Housework." How many of us have considered them as applied to our own individual case?

Enforced separation from one's family.

Loneliness.

Lack of promotion.

Unlimited hours of work.

No day of rest each week.

Non-observance of legal holidays.

Loss of caste.

I do not for one moment belittle the real importance and honorable usefulness of domestic service, as it ought and is to be in the future. The solution need not be the exodus of young

The Bride's Story

women permanently into the factories. The question is solved when to housework are applied those business principles and privileges with which householders are now competing.

Living outside place of employment.

Housework limited to *eight* hours a day.

Housework limited to *six* days a week.

Extra pay for overtime.

I realize that we are on the brink of an unquestionable and momentous change in the status, training, and treatment of domestic wage-earners. They will, of course, be intelligent, scientifically trained, professional women, as much respected and as much specialized as their sisters in medicine, nursing, stenography, and the other trades to-day open to women. My argument is not with domestic work *per se*, but with the mental attitude — conscious or unconscious — of the average family to-day employing servants.

A Honeymoon Experiment

EMPLOYMENT

“Say, you ain’t been tellin’ ‘em you ain’t had experience when you’ve been askin’ for work?”

I nodded my head.

“Aw, say, you’ll never get experience until you say you’ve *had it.*”

These words of wisdom, delivered with great feeling by one of the talented young ladies in the boarding-house, opened for me the door of employment.

They would not employ me because I had never “done it before.” I decided that I was in Rochester to sound the industrial game. If it had to be played — why, I should have to play it, that’s all.

So the next time I asked for work I was prepared for the manager’s question —

“Have you ever been salesgirl before?”

I crossed my fingers, and strove to hold in mind the many occasions when I had presided at bazaars and fairs, and answered him:—

The Bride's Story

"Yes, I have been a salesgirl—in a little town outside of Boston."

Fortunately for me the place was a Saturday job—and the manager, being in need of extras, asked for no recommendation. I went away with the amazing vibrating command:—
"Come at noon to-morrow."

My First Job—Salesgirl

The following noon found me on hand at the Blank Five and Ten Cent Store. I was told to leave my things in the "Girls' Room" downstairs. There in the cramped and not too clean quarters I hung my coat and hat, donned my apron, and waited my turn at the dingy mirror. I remember wondering why I did not feel more excited; and then, quite naturally, I followed my chattering fellow salesgirls out into the basement where I was to taste my first employeeship. The boss put me at the glassware counter. From twelve until ten (with one hour out for supper) I sold cheap, inexcusable, de-

A Honeymoon Experiment

grading junk. To be sure, there were many useful articles, but all over-ornate and entirely lacking in simplicity or artistic feeling. *Cheap.* And cheap people, mostly, came to buy. Cheap because their wages were, and they had never had any chance to know or buy anything but cheap goods. The rag-time which floated down from the other end of the store was cheap — so was practically everything except the ventilation. That was very dear, indeed.

I believe I have never known nine hours equal in length to those nine,— their utter weariness and uninspiring monotony. To be sure, my initiation into the cash-register world was stimulating for a while; my talks with the girls, in between customers, were far from dull; and my amusement at the brusque superiority of those who came to buy helped to relieve the weary sameness. But all this could not counterbalance that aching tiredness of incessant standing. In that nine hours there were eight, out of perhaps one hundred and fifty customers,

The Bride's Story

who spoke to me personally, or treated me otherwise than as an automaton — two of them were men who would have been more considerate in not speaking at all. I had never before realized the power of the customer over the salesgirl. Against those two men's remarks I was utterly helpless.

My fellow salesgirls, however, gave me a quite different relationship. Their friendliness and their cheerfulness amazed me. They helped me with the cash register, they beamed upon me, patted me, told me about their families, their beaus, and (when I asked them) about their wages. They were getting between three and five dollars a week!

The girl at the next counter, I noticed, had not sat down once in the five or six hours I had been there. I asked her if she was n't tired.

"Oh, yes, — but you get used to it. I'm so used to being tired I never think about it now."

"Why don't you sit down now, while you can?" I asked.

A Honeymoon Experiment

She looked around before speaking.

“Take this from me — you don’t want to be seen sitting down too much.”

In a moment or two the boss — young, alert, and raucous-voiced — came to my counter.

“See here, girlie, you can’t register written orders without my O.K., see? — wha’cher do that for, anyway? And don’t you know you can’t leave your counter without asking me?”

“I — I only went to the wash-room,” I faltered.

“Sure, I believe you,” he said, not unkindly; “but it don’t make no difference where you go. You ask me, girlie. See?”

Finally at ten, the four official bells rang for closing up. Our cash registers were emptied, our counters put in order and covered, and we wearily put on our things to stand in line for our pay. The “extras,” of course, were given their envelopes last — so I had plenty of time in which to review my day’s sensations, as I stood waiting for my dollar.

The Bride's Story

I had received two "call-downs" from my boss; I had learned all I cared to about basement ventilation; I had known the futility and weariness of selling unbeautiful, taste-degrading things; I had done up every conceivable shape and size of bundle (and had longed for some implement with which to cut string); I had been called "Dearie" by the floor-walker; I had learned all I needed to about the hours and wages of the girls. But best of all I had become genuinely fond of some of them, in our brief interrupted talks. I had sounded the unlimited reservoirs of their good-will and friendliness.

Waitress

My second job was as waitress in a fifteen-and twenty-cent hash-house. One entered the somewhat dilapidated door into the restaurant itself, and ate one's meals either at one of the (not always inviting) tables or at the counter at the side of the room: that is, if one were a customer. But if one happened to be the wait-

A Honeymoon Experiment

ress, one came at six o'clock in the morning and stayed until two in the afternoon, when Susie, the other waitress, relieved her. It is not difficult to imagine how many of the fifteen- and twenty-cent customers gave tips, and the wages were four dollars and fifty cents a week—fifty-six hours a week, the state law fifty-four hours, and besides that, one was never through at two! There were always the ketchup bottles to be filled, the salt, sugar, or coffee utensils to be replenished, the bread and butter to be cut for the following day, or the mirrors and counter to be cleaned — *after* hours. I think that the thing I most resented, however, was the constant interruption during one's own attempted meals. After the first meal I began to count interruptions, and reached a minimum of five, a maximum of fourteen.

Also I did not always enjoy those meals, even between interruptions. The kitchen was a dingy little room perhaps eight by twelve feet opening off the restaurant; a room without

The Bride's Story

windows, without ventilation, and without hot water. And there I learned many facts about the preparation of food in public places. I learned that one never throws away food merely because it drops on the floor; that all utilizable "remains" on the dishes from the restaurant are used again either in the same or in altered form. And in the realm of meat (mostly cold storage) — well, there is an unwritten law against discarding any meat, no matter what its condition. Soda, I found, is an entirely indispensable requisite in restaurant kitchens.

But my waitress experiences were not all of this somber hue. There were two very bright spots in those days of "dish-slinging," — Bob, the chef, and Cy, the dish-washer. My heart warmed toward Bob for the kind, helpful way in which he instructed me in my duties. Very fortunately I was assuming them on a Sunday — an off-day for the Imperial Restaurant, so the demands on my capacity were not only far less, but it devolved upon Bob rather than upon

A Honeymoon Experiment

the manager to give me my first instructions. The boss, Bob warned me, was a very difficult person to please, and he was likely to be rather abrupt and critical. But I was told that I must not get "fussed up" by it.

Between Sunday customers we discussed all the problems of the world; Bob told me about his girl, or rather girls; and Cy entertained us with tales of his world-wide travels. Once he turned to me and said:—

"Say, Margaret,—suppose you was a rich man's daughter and never had to work. What'd you think it'd feel like?"

"What makes you ask that, Cy?" For a second I thought he suspected me.

"Oh, I dunno,—nothin' special. Say, what'd you do, if you was?" (No, he was entirely ingenuous.)

"I'd try to help the people that were n't so fortunate as I was, Cy. And then you see I'd have time to work all I wanted to for woman suffrage."

The Bride's Story

The joy and unhampered freedom of those talks — their human realness and value! I have searched in vain for a social gathering of previous years to balance them.

On Monday the boss appeared. And although I had learned to accost each customer with cutlery, three slices of bread, butter, and an "Order, please," I had, alas, not learned to carry more than two large and loaded plates in one hand, and two "bird bathtubs" in the other: three was the requisite. Indeed, the first notice that was taken of me was when the boss discovered that I could only carry two. He had not felt called upon to answer my "Good-morning" at his first appearance, but he shouted with righteous indignation when he discovered my deficiencies in plate-carrying. The customers were not nearly so startled as I. For two days I struggled to keep my temper under the lash of his insolent superiority.

On the third day of my service I slaved as I believe I had never slaved before or since, sit-

A Honeymoon Experiment

ting down thirteen times in eight hours, five times during "breakfast," eight during the noonday meal. It was just about time for me to leave the insufferable heat of the little kitchen when the boss appeared in the doorway.

"You ain't needed here any more," he informed me.

Bob's "Well, I'm damned!" relieved the situation.

My first impulse was to take my dismissal as most employees would have taken it—silently. It is incredible that a person not dependent upon the wage involved — one naturally independent — should have been as intimidated as I was by that overbearing misuse of employer's power. And yet it was only by a supreme effort that I forced my sense of justice to overcome my sense of intimidation. In those few tense seconds I realized how helpless the average wage-dependent employee must feel against that employer's power.

I fought against it enough to ask why I was

The Bride's Story

being dismissed. Quite evidently such a question had never before been put to him, and there was an amazed instant before he turned back into the restaurant. I followed him there and reinsisted:—

“I would like to know why my work is unsatisfactory.”

He retreated into the kitchen — I in dignified, if determined, pursuit. Again he took refuge in the restaurant, and there, finally cornered, he turned on me fiercely:—

“You ain’t no good, you ain’t experienced, and I could n’t learn you.”

I started to remove my apron and replied:—

“No, I don’t believe you could learn me,— or rather I should say, teach me, because I feel that I could be taught only by a person of good breeding. Good-afternoon.”

Rag-Time Clerk

“Wanted — Girl to play piano.”

I copied down the address, and within an

A Honeymoon Experiment

hour I was sight-reading for the manager of another of Rochester's five and ten cent stores. Rag-time is not my forte, but it was even less than that of the frightened girls who floundered over the keyboard before my turn came.

"I want some one to play for me on trial today," he said, nodding as I played.

It was Saturday, my lucky day.

I was inserted on a little platform between its protecting brass rail and the piano, with barely enough room in which to operate. And I was expected to pound, bang, and thump rag-time from eight-thirty until six, with a ten per cent commission on all music which I sold as a result of said pounding, banging, and thumping. That was if I made good. Fortunately for me, as a Saturday "try-out" I was to receive a flat one dollar, and found myself at six o'clock with but three dollars' worth of sales, and a consequent "seventy cents to the good." I did not feel the seventy cents unearned.

On the contrary, I left that store with the

The Bride's Story

shattered feelings of the mother of a delicately nurtured child, who has been paid to watch her child beaten into insensibility. Not only had I been asked to play as loud as possible "to get customers in off the street." Not only had I been told, "Don't push the new things which sell, anyway; play the old stuff that don't go. Get it out of stock." But all this I had to do in competition with a phonograph playing thunderous records at the other end of the store!

There had, however, been one compensation. A brilliant and benevolent idea had seized me. For several years I have been interested in Music Settlements, as the means of giving to people who could not otherwise have lessons, high-rate music at low prices. It seems to me that one of America's greatest needs is more music. It is the one universal language for all races and all kinds of people. Here, then, was an opportunity to attempt a little musical uplift upon my working-girl associates — a little surreptitious Music Settlement Work. I watched

A Honeymoon Experiment

my chance when the manager was at the other end of the store, and I began playing, in my most rag-time touch, the Soldiers' March from "Carmen." I was feeling quite helpful and quite virtuous, indeed, when suddenly I heard a voice from a near-by counter:—

"Aw, say, would you mind playing 'Did You Ever Hear of Anybody Dying from a Kiss' . . ."

There had never been a Music Settlement for her.

As for my boss, he reminded me that I was there to sell what they had in the store. "Classical stuff's too expensive and too much bother." At the end of my day of musical prostitution the following conversation ensued:

"It's no use, Mr. Sanford, I can't stand rag-time all day long."

"No, I guess you've been used to playing a little different, a little—well—" reluctantly—"a little better kind of music."

"Yes," I replied; "the last place I worked I did n't play rag-time."

The Bride's Story

"No, you ain't got the rag-time touch."

I thanked him, assuring him that a "rag-time touch" was no touch at all. With that I departed, both of us mutually satisfied: he that the future might hold for him some one who could make more noise; I with the knowledge that his girls received between three and five dollars a week, and that Music Settlements were more necessary than ever!

The Chemical Shop

My fourth job was in a chemical shop where I found the one exception to the employers with whom I came in contact. I found an employer who did not superimpose upon me the feeling of his superiority and power. I could not ask for a nicer relationship than Mr. Borden gave me. To be sure, I received only five dollars a week, but, on the other hand, our weekly hours were six and a quarter less than the fifty-four hour law.

I sat, or stood, at one of the long tables in the

A Honeymoon Experiment

packing-room, weighing and measuring pills, bottling them, labeling and sealing the bottles. Sometimes I filled bottles from huge vats of liquid compounds, and then corked them, labeled, boxed and re-boxed them. There was only one other person in the packing department, a reserved, sallow, listless girl whose weariness I began to understand after one day of chemical fumes. The odors from the laboratory and the fine dust from the pills we handled, resulted — for me — in a headache most of the time I worked. I realized at least one of the causes for that almost universal tired-eyed fatigue of factory girls. Very seldom does one meet an efficiently healthful woman who has been long addicted to factory work.

And yet that job could hardly be called factory employment. The room was a large, spacious one, and except for the disadvantages of the work itself was a fairly pleasant place in which to labor. Then there was the delightful informality of Mr. Borden's comings and goings,

The Bride's Story

such as would be impossible, of course, in any except very small industrial concerns.

The Cravat Factory

The contrast between Mr. Borden and my next employer was extreme. I applied, a few days later, at a cravat factory in answer to an advertisement I had seen in the newspaper.

“Wanted — Bright young girl.”

I was interviewed by a huge, burly, bear-like man — the kind of boss one reads about in books. He chewed an enormous cigar, expectorated with extraordinary regularity and efficiency: in short, he was not a person one cared to know intimately. And yet I must give him credit for being the one employer who in my interviews seemed to take notice of my stock phrase, “I know how to use my head and keep it.” I did not arrive that morning until seven o’clock, so the position advertised had already been taken — and he was about to turn away when that phrase arrested him.

A Honeymoon Experiment

“Can you write?” he demanded.

“I’m willing to show you my handwriting,” I said.

He gave me paper and pencil, and watched me as I wrote. I waited for him to speak, but he seemed lost in the reflective joys of chewing his cigar. Finally he mused:—

“Well, I was n’t thinking of this job this morning, but if you want to make out checks I’ll let you have it to-day.”

“What would the pay be?” I ventured.

He looked at me appraisingly.

“Six dollars a week.”

“And what are the hours?” I managed to ask.

“Seven-thirty in the morning until six at night. An hour out for lunch.”

I cannot express how difficult it was for me to ask even those entirely just and pertinent questions. Contrary to every instinct in me, I found myself forced to a sense of humility, of subdued appeal, with an overpowering feeling

The Bride's Story

that to ask for more than was offered was to lose what was offered. I shook myself out of the insistent psychology and inquired:—

“That’s not very much pay, is it, for such long hours?”

“You can take it, or leave it.”

I took it.

At seven-thirty Mary, my more immediate boss, arrived, a typically weary example of “the woman who toils,” her buoyancy and her vitality gone, become by the nature and reason of her work an automatic, monotonized machine. We left our hats and coats in a little cupboard, at the end of the big cutting-room where we were to work, and Mary listlessly directed me to a high wall-desk near the stock-tables. I perched myself upon one of the tall stools in front of a formidable pile of papers, and felt very clerical, indeed. I was, I found, to make out recording checks from the salesmen’s sheets, for the cutter, the band-stitcher, the operator, the labeler, the boxer, and the finisher. In

A Honeymoon Experiment

brief, I was the connecting link between the selling and the producing end of the business. To be sure, I was merely an automatic cog in the machine, but "automatic" does not mean that work is not concentrated and wearing, I was to find. One slip in a figure or a number might mean a dozen or a gross of neckties cut wrong, and also a generous cut in one's salary. It was a relentless sort of a job, mechanically responsible, but uninteresting, uninspiring.

Yet indistinct, illegible, and bewildering as were those salesman sheets, they were as charted maps when compared with the indistinctness and confusion of the manner in which Mary explained the system to me. She thought of and told me things quite casually, quite unenlighteningly,—with an astounding disregard of the intimate connection between causes and effects. In consequence I was forced to ask innumerable questions, which she answered in a manner plainly inquiring, "Don't you even know that without asking?" Mary was be-

The Bride's Story

coming a martyr. I began to hesitate to make inquiries, with resultant mistakes, which Mary handled somewhat after this fashion, for the benefit of the rest of the room:—

“Say, Margaret, you did n’t put down that this was a special order.”

“How would I know that it was special?” I asked.

“By the color of the order sheet,” laconically—an item Mary had neglected to mention to begin with.

A moment later:—

“And here you’ve got order 1375A instead of 1575A.”

I went over to investigate.

“That salesman’s order certainly looks like 1375 to me, Mary.”

“Yes, but we have n’t got a style 1375,” she added, with an air of triumphant finality.

When the lunch hour arrived, I was given a card with my name, address, and department registered, and this I inserted into the time-

A Honeymoon Experiment

clock which records one's arrival and departure morning, noon, and evening. We streamed out into the glaring noonday sun, and I found myself beside one of the girls who worked in the cutting department.

"It's even hotter out than it was in there, is n't it?" she offered.

"That's saying a good deal," I said.

"T ain't as bad as it has been, though."

"Have you been working there long?" I asked as we walked along.

"No; I'm not there a week yet. Don't even know yet how much I'm going to get."

"What do you mean?" I inquired.

"Why, none of us that was hired last week could get the boss to say how much he'd pay us. And we all wanted work so bad we just took the jobs and we won't know till Saturday. I hope it'll be enough to pay my board."

She turned in at a dilapidated boarding-house.

"See you later," she nodded.

The Bride's Story

For two days I stuck to the nervous concentration and automatic responsibility of my "clerical" work. But owing to the contrariness of Mary and the weather combined, I felt that I was perhaps taking more out of myself than was consistent with our vow against health sacrifice. I went to my boss a little apprehensively.

"Mr. Goldstein, I'm sorry, but I can't stand the strain of that work from seven-thirty in the morning until six at night. I have to get my own breakfast before I come, and my supper when I get home,— and then I'm doing my own laundry," I added apologetically.

"Those are our hours," he replied gruffly, "and I guess we can't change 'em for you."

"I'm not asking you to, Mr. Goldstein,— I'm just telling you I can't stand them."

He grunted a "sorry"— the enormity of which admission encouraged me to proceed.

"Mr. Goldstein,"— I faltered.

He lit his cigar.

A Honeymoon Experiment

"Mr. Goldstein," I plunged in again, "I think in doing that work that I've earned a living. And yet you're paying me six dollars, and that's two dollars a week less than the Minimum Wage Commissions say is the very least a girl can live on!"

He consigned the commissions to a place I shall not mention here.

"Commission or no commission, those are the wages we pay. We pay what a girl is worth."

"You mean what the people on top who want to make their fortunes *say* she's worth," I retorted.

"Why, I was n't getting but six dollars a week, a few years ago, myself," he said.

I fear that I was not duly impressed with the finality of his argument. I seized the opening.

"Well, for that very reason, don't you want to help make it easier for the rest of us — and for the people that come after you?"

He did n't have time for "them social problems."

The Bride's Story

"But why not make it an individual problem? Here's your chance to give all these people a square deal." He seemed dazed.

I went on, now, quite relentlessly:—

"Mr. Goldstein, they've just passed a law in Oregon saying that no female employee shall receive less than \$8.25 a week. Now, what do you think of that law?"

He showed his versatile knowledge of New York legislation by inquiring:—

"Have we got that law here in New York?"

And there was my opportunity!

"Good Heavens, no — have we equal suffrage in New York?"

"No, and it will be a damn long time before we will have it!"

I agreed that we have against us the liquor, the vice, and the propertied interests, and that those are, indeed, strong in New York.

The woman suffrage interlude more or less closed our impersonal conversation, but as we walked away from the factory, he told me con-

A Honeymoon Experiment

siderable of his personal hard luck, the falsity of his very best friend, his consequent financial failure and struggles: all with a dogged sense of his individual misfortune, but with no realization of the necessity of coöperative rather than competitive effort; no glimpse of the need for banding together with other unfortunates. Unintelligent though he was, smoking, expectorating, for all that, as I said good-bye to him I had a strong, warm feeling of sympathy and liking for his great, rough, uncouth personality. Perhaps if he had had a chance—

Piano-Player at the "Movies"

My last job was as piano-player in a moving-picture show, for one endless, excruciating, terrible day. Of course, much of the wear and tear for me sprang from the fact that I had never done it before, and I had to play as if I had! But aside from the extenuating character of my personal dilemma, there is an undoubted strain in the work of the moving-picture ac-

The Bride's Story

companist. My piano was directly under the glaring, ever-changing picture-screen — my head was tilted back at an angle of forty-five degrees; but hardest of all I think were the dizzying new demands made upon my eyesight.

The drummer boy put my impressions into words for me in between reels.

"Pretty tough on your eyes," he observed.

"It is rather, is n't it?" I agreed.

"The last girl was here three years — she just left last week, and she's just about blind. Got nervous prostration, too. Too bad," he nodded; "she was supportin' herself and her mother."

It was time for us to play again. But as I thumped away, first in march time, next in waltz, and then in chords of tragedy, there drummed in the back of my mind the relentless rhythm of "Three years, nearly blind, health gone, no support." That night, weary in mind, body, spirit, and eyes, I sought the manager,

A Honeymoon Experiment

after the performance. He made no move to pay me.

"I came for my pay," I suggested.

"Oh, you want to be paid, do you?"

"Yes," I said.

Without a word, he gave me one dollar, turned to his companion and went on talking. . . . A silent dismissal and a new sympathy for my predecessor.

Her job had been "specialist" work. Not only is it precluded to all people who do not play the piano, but to all who cannot improvise and transpose with sufficient rapidity to break into the "Star Spangled Banner," when President Wilson jerks across the screen, and in the next breath to greet the Kaiser with "Die Wacht am Rhein." For three years she had performed this specialized work, from ten in the morning until ten-thirty or eleven at night — with one hour out for both meals. Seventy-two hours a week! Her reward had been nervous prostration, partial blindness, and — seven dollars a week!

The Bride's Story

Summary of Employment Campaign

<i>Jobs applied for</i>	<i>In person</i>	<i>By letter</i>
Paper-box companies	3	..
Laundries	4	..
Cravat factory	2	..
Spectacle factory	1	..
Cutlery factory	1	..
Shoe factory	3	..
Kodak factory	2	..
Chemical factory	1	..
Ketchup factory	1	..
Perfumery factory	1	..
Bakery	3	..
Five- and ten-cent stores....	4	..
Grocery stores	3	..
Department stores	4	..
Clothes store	2	..
Moving-picture company....	1	..
Theatrical agency	2	..
Waitress	7	3
Piano accompanist (moving- picture shows, etc.)	13	2
Shoe packing	2	..
Hat trimming	1	..
Floor-scrubbing	2	..
Chorus girl	2
Second maid	9	3
Salesmanship	4	1
Clerical	4	1
	—	—
	80	12

A Honeymoon Experiment

At last I had swung into the field of employment. By displaying a certain amount of nerve and ingenuity I found that I could get work from time to time. I had to get up early. I had to be persistent. Sometimes I had to be not altogether truthful. But I found that a woman could get work — of sorts. Meanwhile Stuart was having a terrible time securing any sort of a chance to work. Unquestionably it is easier for a woman to get a job than it is for a man. The reason is very simple. There are in industry considerable numbers of women who do not have to live on what they earn. They are able to accept less than a living wage, and their sisters are consequently forced to. A man usually must be paid enough to keep alive upon. Hence the demand for women, particularly in the unskilled trades, is very much greater than for men.

“Besides,” we hear it argued, “many of these industries could not exist if they paid a living wage. And then a great many of the girls live at home anyway.”

The Bride's Story

Suppose a girl does live at home, is that any reason that her family should subsidize her employer by paying the difference between what she *earns* and what it costs her to live? On the contrary, no business which cannot pay a living wage to its employees has any moral right to exist. Every human being born into the world has a right to live—has a right to a *living*, provided he or she works.

THE WHITE-SLAVE PROBLEM

No one who has read Kaufman's "House of Bondage" can wonder at the number of girls who finally drift into an immoral life, after their disheartening struggle against an insufficient wage and the inducements to a more remunerative life so constantly proffered to them. While I was at the Imperial Restaurant I came into personal contact with that lurking danger which awaits the working-girl.

I was punching a customer's ticket one day, and heard him ask quietly,—

A Honeymoon Experiment

"Do you know any young lady that vants vork?"

"No, I don't happen to," I replied.

"Good vages, nine dollars a week, pouring perfumery into bottles."

"Nine dollars a week? Why, I only get four dollars and fifty cents here."

"Vould n't you like the place yourself?" he suggested.

"Oh, no, it would n't be square. I've just come here — and I could n't do that."

"Vell, think it over. Come and see me this afternoon," he urged, handing me a piece of paper from his wallet.

I saw that he had given me his name and address, and I put the paper in my apron pocket. Later, I went out into the kitchen and said to Bob, —

"Say, Bob, I had a sort of funny offer just now. A man offered me nine dollars a week pouring perfumery into bottles."

Bob's excitement was colossal.

The Bride's Story

"That's where I seen that man before," he exploded; "that's where! — Say, girlie, I used to keep a restaurant in Syracuse and that man used to come and make dates with all my girls. Used to give 'em little nickel knives — shaped like boots — Well, I guess we had him looked up and he was a nice kind of a man, he was! We got him arrested outside the restaurant door and he got t'ree years — Say, that's where I seen him before!"

I was rather excited myself, and I said, —

"He'd be a good sort of a person to investigate, would n't he, Bob?"

"M — yes, if you take your husband along."

That afternoon, Stuart and I, after due consideration, made our way to the address which had been given me. We found ourselves on a narrow side street, in the most dilapidated part of town, gazing at a rambling, shabby house, whose piazza steps gave ominously under our cautious footsteps. Guardedly we rang the doorbell. The man himself opened the door!

A Honeymoon Experiment

Evidently he was in alliance with the landlady. His expression, when he saw me with a male escort, was worthy of C. D. Gibson, but he played his part shrewdly and ushered us into his "reception-room." The furniture included a bed, bureau, some chairs, and a table. With a gesture he designated a very specious and dubious-looking array of perfumery bottles, arranged on the table, an array quite evidently gathered from a near-by drug store. There was no sign of vats from which perfumery might be poured, no hall-marks of a workshop. Very suavely and very profusely our host asked us to sit down, and I noticed that the hair around his temples — he did not take off his hat — was closely shaven. He talked as rapidly as it is possible for a human being to talk — sketching out a very plausible explanation of the perfumery business which he was trying to establish in various cities.

"The last place I put it through vas in Syracuse," he said, "and now I vant two young

The Bride's Story

girls with heads, while I make a business in Rochester.”

He turned to Stuart.

“I vant to tell you, young man, the minute I saw your vife I knew she had a head. I have been in many restaurants, but I have never seen any von who can sling the dishes the vay she can. And you — vhen you have not got vork, and you vant to come here and read your newspaper, it vas all right — sure.”

He hardly seemed to stop for breath, so eager was he.

“Of course, vhen ve start to vork these furniture vas taken out into the next room and this vill be made like an office. All these things vill be taken out,” he repeated.

It was finally arranged that he should appear at the restaurant the next day, and if I wanted the job, I should say “Yes,” if not, “No.” At this point he offered to let us smell his perfumery, and there we feel we made a false step. Fearing the possible consequences, we refused,

A Honeymoon Experiment

and, of course, must have put him on his guard — if he had not been already suspicious. His manner when we started to go was not at all regretful, but was distinctly evasive when I inquired about some nickel knives which I suddenly noticed on the table.

“Oh, just little souvenirs what we give our customers,” he said.

It was an oddly shaped knife, and, we thought to ourselves, easily describable by the excited Bob’s “boot-shaped”!

Outside on the sidewalk again, we compared suspicions, and after a few minutes’ walk and consultation we decided to go to police headquarters. But as we mounted the stone steps, we stopped short.

“Suppose they should ask us who *we* are!”

“Well, we’ve certainly got to report this man, whatever happens,” said Stuart.

So we went in.

We told our story to a much interested official, who waited until we had finished, and then

The Bride's Story

told us that the detective we wanted was upstairs. At last we were ushered to the appropriately important person.

That gentleman neither removed his hat from his head, his cigar from his mouth, nor his feet from his desk. He seemed not only uninterested in our tale, but distinctly suspicious and skeptical of us. In spite of it we told our story and his manner gradually changed. To our surprise, however, his interest seemed to be in us, rather than in the "case." He thought it too bad that a nice girl like me could not earn more than four dollars and fifty cents a week. We steered him back to our story. Quite casually he took down the description of the man, still more casually he called an officer, and there seemed to be nothing more that we could do.

"I will send around and investigate the man," he said.

"Could n't we all go together?" I asked.

My suggestion did not meet with favor. So with a final plea that the investigation be made

A Honeymoon Experiment

immediately on account of the man's probable uneasiness due to our visit, we left, powerless to do anything else.

On telephoning to the headquarters we learned that the police had been sent only the morning of the next day. Charles Hoffman had left, bag and baggage, within one hour after our departure from his room!

ANOTHER PROBLEM

"Yes, but if girls did not invite the advances of these men, they would not receive them."

How often I have heard women indulge in that comfortable dismissal of the subject. My life in Rochester taught me — what I had dimly realized before — that there are two distinct attitudes of the average man toward women. There is his attitude of mind and manner toward the protected woman, and his attitude toward the unprotected woman. I wish you would walk down the main street of Rochester with me and listen to my little second-maid

The Bride's Story

friend. I have never met a more genuine and sensitive nature.

"Mrs. Chase, I'm so discouraged I don't know what to do. I have been looking for work for four weeks now."

"Four weeks?" I exclaimed.

"Yes; and now I can't take cars to my interviews any more, I'm getting so low on money. I just walk and walk and get so tired. What's a girl to do?"

"Do you mean you have n't had one chance for a position in four weeks?"

She hesitated.

"Well, there was one place I could have had. But, you see, I'm pretty particular."

We walked on, and I waited for her to continue.

"But it does n't always do you much good to be particular. The last place I went, such a nice lady engaged me. And when I got there — the man of the house — well — he made it impossible for me to stay. It's pretty hard, is n't

A Honeymoon Experiment

it," she broke out, "when you see the girl that is n't decent always getting the best chance? — And when you *do* struggle along, and keep decent, and earn your little five dollars a week — what is there to live for?"

There are so many shapes and forms of this danger which await the unprotected girl. The risk of answering newspaper advertisements is in itself considerable. How many girls, in need of work, would sense a note of warning in the advertisement, "Wanted — Bright young girl, for light work. Good pay." One of the girls in our boarding-house had answered such an advertisement. Her parents, unfortunately, had equipped her with the arms of Ignorance, deeming it equivalent to Innocence. She had no sense of premonition as she was led upstairs for her interview, — in fact, not until she found herself in a bedroom with the door locked.

"You can't imagine how queer I felt," she told us, "when the handsomest man I ever saw came into the room. He came in just as if he'd

The Bride's Story

always known me — just as affectionate and familiar like.”

“Were n’t you suspicious then?” we asked her.

“Well, I was when the woman motioned him to go away. Then she told me that the work would be selling a wash for eyeglasses, and she asked how old I was.”

“What did you say?”

“Something told me not to let her know I was only twenty years old — and just like a flash I found myself telling her that I guessed I could n’t do the work, because it would take too much time from my husband and my three little children.”

“How did you get out?” we asked excitedly.

“Why, she was just so stumped at that husband of mine and the three children that she unlocked the door, kind of in a dream. You bet I did n’t let any grass grow under my feet!”

By some miracle the psychology of her

A Honeymoon Experiment

quick-witted story had been successful. Those less clever girls whom we never hear about!

And yet, what are we doing for those girls whom we do know about? I had often heard of cases in our Boston stores, in which the employment manager has suggested to girls an easy and lucrative means of supplementing insufficient wages. But we are not likely to be more than passively disturbed about these "cases we hear about"! Imagine yourself, rather, talking to a very average, everyday girl, while you wait in an employment office. You have talked with her for some time about jobs (their scarcity), and wages, and Rochester, and the moving-picture shows, and the parks. And you ask her if she has tried for work at Blank's, quite the most important and respectable department store in town?

Immediately she is alert, startled and challenging.

"Yes; did you get it put up to you, too?"

"What do you mean?"

The Bride's Story

"Oh, I thought perhaps you meant something, when you asked."

"I don't understand," puzzled.

"Well, when I asked for work at Blank's I was offered six dollars. And I told Mr. —— that I could n't live on six dollars — I could n't make both ends meet." She stopped.

"What did he say?" I invited her.

"He said he guessed I could find some *friend* to help pay my board. That's what he said."

A few weeks later another girl told me the identical story, and again the employer's name came out scornfully, unmistakably. Girls with some grievance, or some axe to grind? Strange, then, that the same accusation came voluntarily from the head of a charitable organization and from the wife of a prominent Rochester minister!

I believe that the time must come, if it has not already come, when our attitude — particularly the attitude of the "protected" woman — must change toward the girl who has

A Honeymoon Experiment

succumbed to temptation — temptation that often comes, as I have shown, from the top down. It is all very well for those of us who have not the remotest conception of that temptation to say, "I would rather starve than sell myself," but not one of us knows of what stuff we are made until the test is applied. Some day we women will have a word to correspond to the man's word — "fraternal."

AND FINALLY

During those eight weeks in Rochester I had applied for ninety-two positions. I had held six; the hours ranging from forty-eight to seventy-two hours, the wages from four dollars and fifty cents to seven dollars per week. I had felt the sure, gradual killing of individual initiative under the forces of mechanically automatic work and employee subservience. I had felt the powerlessness of the woman in industry, her helplessness as an isolated bargainer against the cruelly insufficient wage sys-

The Bride's Story

tem. I had found that some employers give their employees easy hours, rest-rooms, reading rooms, and hygienic places in which to work. But everywhere I had found the unwillingness to give a living wage. I met personally and heard incessantly of that particular and inexcusable misuse of employer's power, forcing the girl to give up her job or her good name. And in spite of having attacked my industrial life in the best of health (with a six weeks' rest and vacation behind me), I had come to feel the beginnings of that weariness which characterized many of my fellow workers.

The efficiency experts are agreed that in industries requiring concentrated effort, the maximum of efficiency is reached in an eight-hour day. This admission of human endurance is based on the maximum amount of output obtainable, not on any theory of justice for the laborer. But the inferences in regard to the laborer's health and endurance are significant.

In all my six jobs I worked over eight hours

A Honeymoon Experiment

a day (Saturdays excepted), and in all these jobs I received less than a living wage. I came to realize, as never before, the crying need for protective legislation for women in industries — the need of shorter hours, minimum wage laws, and factory inspection (enforcement as well as laws). To be sure, the State of New York has a fifty-four-hour law, and some States have forty-eight-hour laws, for their women. But that limits the number of hours for the week, not for the day. And an employer may demand twelve hours of work one day if he so desires—just so long as the week's maximum is not exceeded. There is no limit in New York to the insufficiency of wage which one may be forced to accept.

If I were destined to enter the industrial world permanently, or for any length of time, I should make every possible effort to go to one of the States where suffrage has been granted to women. If I were to work in Colorado, California, or Oregon, I should have the protection

The Bride's Story

of both an eight-hour law for women, and a Minimum Wage Commission. There are only five States in the Union which have an eight-hour law for their women and these five are equal suffrage States — Colorado, California, Oregon, Arizona, and Wyoming. Of the seven States which have an effective Minimum Wage Commission, five are equal suffrage States (Colorado, California, Oregon, Washington, and Utah). And Kansas, a sixth, has a Wage Commission Act. It is also not irrelevant to remember that the greatest number of women in industry are found not in these States, but in the male suffrage States! For every hour that I worked over eight hours a day, I became that many thousand degrees more a Suffragist, for I have proved, in those Rochester weeks, that a disenfranchised class tends to become an exploited class.

It is impossible, of course, for those who have not burned their bridges behind them ever to know the real and bitter struggle of the men and

A Honeymoon Experiment

women whose earning power is all that stands between them and starvation. And yet in those few weeks I caught significant glimpses of the sternness of life for the rank and file of our citizens, which no amount of previous "sympathy" had ever suggested to me. More nearly than ever before I was the unprotected woman. I felt somewhat her handicaps and her weaknesses, but more keenly than anything I felt her strength and her possibilities. I learned to know and to love her. For a brief time I knew the weariness of working all day, and then coming home to housework at night. My old life, with its round of friendships, visits, traveling, and personal interests, took on a new and an almost trivial aspect. I began to realize that heretofore I had been playing with existence, and I do not think that I can ever go back altogether to the old life. There will always be a little part of me wandering there in Rochester.

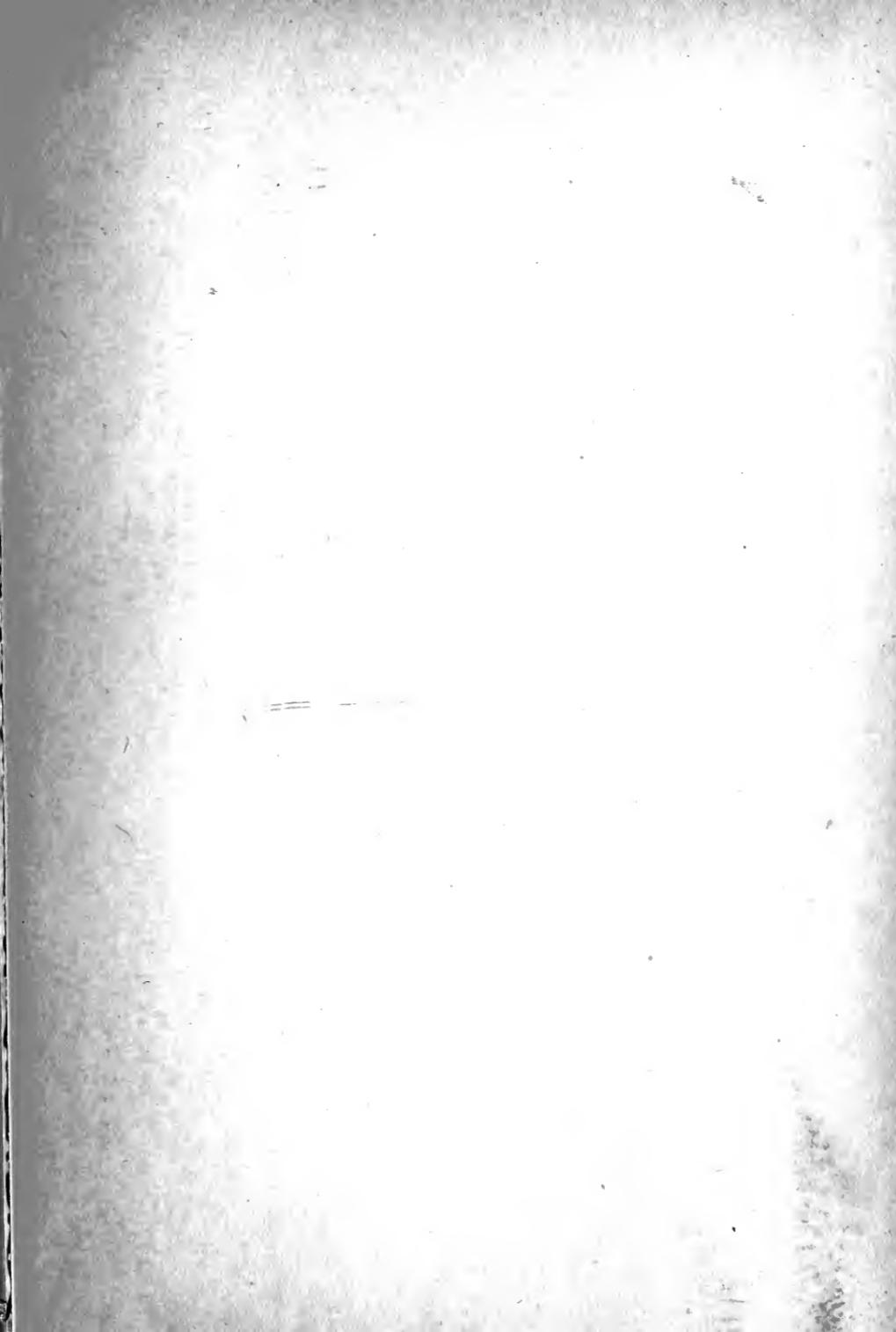
Finally, I realize that perhaps many people are shaking their heads as to the wisdom and

The Bride's Story

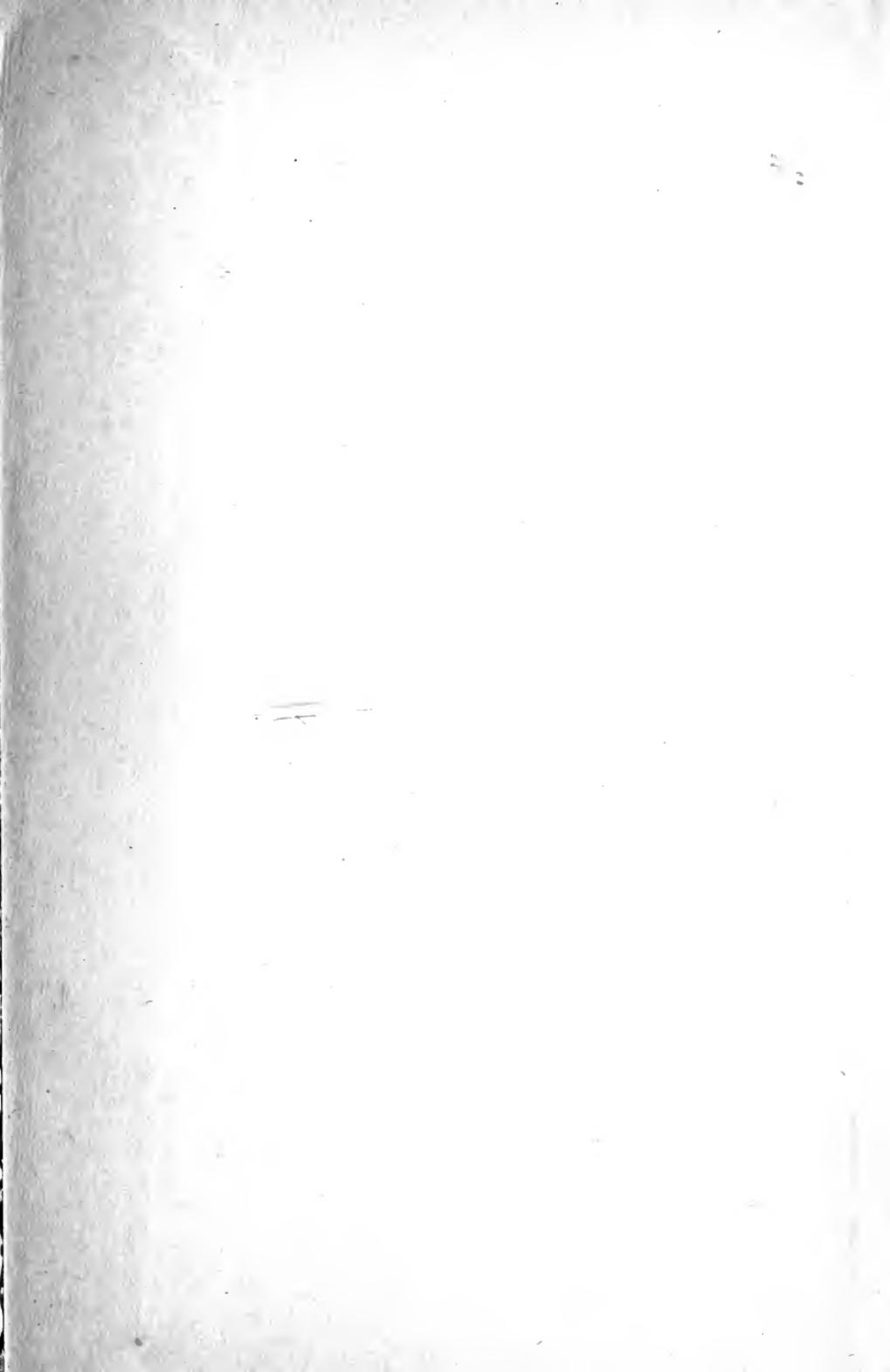
gallantry of a groom in sharing with a bride experiences of so unsheltered a nature. The "stalwart oak and clinging vine" idea of romance does not favor independent thinking and action for women. But to me that utter equality and comradeship — in the midst of life as it is for the many, not as it is for the few — is chivalry in reality. You see, we shared everything. To me it was the most complete tribute which any man could pay to any woman.

THE END

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE · MASSACHUSETTS
U · S · A







LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 019 566 908 9